



THE LAE VOICE

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Great Public Schools for Every Louisiana Child

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LAE HOSTS SUCCESSFUL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EVENT IN SULPHUR, LOUISIANA

Educators from across the state recently took part in a major instructional professional development opportunity sponsored by the LAE—*Educating the Whole Child: A Toolkit of Best Practices for Great Louisiana Public School Educators*.

The day-long event provided educators from across the state with an opportunity to learn about innovative strategies geared toward teaching in 21st-century classrooms. The conference offered one-of-a-kind sessions led by Louisiana educators. Topics ranged from Common Core best practices to information on important aspects of Louisiana education policy to using emerging technology in the classroom.

Amy Bogan, a consultant with the Danielson Group, presented the conference attendees with information on the *Framework for Teaching* by Charlotte Danielson. Bogan pointed out that Louisiana education leaders ignored important procedures in adopting the rubric—procedures that would have made COMPASS a professional development map instead of the punitive method that’s used today.

The group also learned about the role that educators play in the testing resistance and reform movement. Robert Schaeffer from FairTest discussed how educators, parents, students, and community leaders across the U.S. are building a strong coalition to challenge testing misuse and overuse.

Conference attendee and Vermilion Association of Educators member Karen Richardson said the event was a great opportunity to get quality professional development from real teachers at a great price.

“The workshops were relevant to me and the work I do in my classroom,” Richardson said. “Overall, the conference was inspiring, and the information I received will definitely be put into place with my students. I can’t wait for the next professional development opportunity offered by the LAE!”

LAE leaders would like to thank Calcasieu Parish Superintendent Karl Bruchhaus for hosting the event and LAE member Dr. Sheryl Abshire and her staff for presenting and running the operations for the conference.



LAE member Pat Thomas and UniServ Director Terry Holden smile alongside Ervin Weldon as he signs up to be a member of the association.



Conference attendees listen intently as Robert Schaeffer from Fair Test discusses the current test resistance trend.



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Debbie Meaux, President

The Louisiana Department of Education recently released a report on the second year of implementation of the teacher evaluation process—you can read the report by visiting the following website: <http://www.louisianabelieves.com/newsroom/news-releases/2014/10/22/annual-report-shows-districts-and-schools-making-academic-progress-have-higher-expectations-for-classroom-observations>. Through this report, the department claims that school systems holding a high bar of excellence for teacher observations made the most significant strides with students. Upon reading these findings, there are a few significant points I'd like to address.

First, it's been found that the LaDOE manipulated school scores to mirror last year's percentages in order to reach certain mandates. The increase in "A schools" at the elementary and middle school levels is a result of score manipulation which does not offer an accurate portrayal of true school quality. Louisiana Superintendent of Education John White said we will see more schools receiving lower scores in the coming years. I agree with this, considering that our accountability system is being artificially rigged to soften the initial blow to scores. It appears as though implementation is being set up this way to avoid the major shock of declining scores in order to give the PARCC test an easier transition. It appears as though BESE plans to steadily increase the "cut scores" and the definition of an "A school," which only stands to mislead the public, drive down confidence in our neighborhood schools, and cause a more aggressive push for school privatization through vouchers and charter schools—and we all know what this means for public school funding.

In the report, Superintendent White claims that no school is denigrated, no student humiliated, and no teacher punished. In my opinion, this statement is inaccurate, considering some students failed a new, more difficult test that many had little to no experience taking, a test that not all educators were fully prepared to teach.

Several schools were, in fact, denigrated due to falling school performance scores despite the LaDOE's attempt to implement a "fail safe" system to ensure the same number of As, Bs, Cs, etc. How is this fair to students, teachers, and schools whose educators are in the middle of retooling during a time of transition? Under the current structure of Louisiana's school accountability system, schools falling into the C, D, and F ranges risk losing students to charter schools, paving the way for BESE to approve even more Type 2-charter schools, which unconstitutionally divert funding that should otherwise be used to pay for the operation of parish schools. The LAE is currently pursuing legal action that would rightfully require funding to be used as it was intended—for parish public schools.

Another issue with the LaDOE report is Superintendent White's request to have state legislative auditors do an external review of the implementation of this year's modified accountability system. In my opinion, this is an imperfect solution to a complicated problem with no reliable answer. It may ensure that the modified system was applied as was intended, but it doesn't guarantee an agreed-upon level of quality in the measured school systems. (That would take a much better system with multiple criteria and consensus on what quality should look like in statewide school systems.) Quality is often relative to the environment and circumstances in which the school exists; since not all criteria fit every school, it's highly unlikely that there is a universal "cut score" that can or should measure real quality. Superintendent White referred to school report cards as "tools that help parents and educators understand what is happening in their schools." I feel this statement is insincere, since the scores do not adhere to a steady, agreed-upon scoring methodology used from year to year to indicate accepted levels of quality. One has to consider that the test itself has changed and will change again this year; and furthermore, the scores have been artificially manipulated to produce predetermined outcomes.

Additionally, Superintendent White hints at the cruelty of the accountability system. This is ironic considering this year and next are years in which the accountability system is being tweaked to ensure predetermined results. Superintendent White admits that in the following years, it will become more challenging for schools to maintain high ratings. While the reprieve from the negative effects of accountability is needed, it is not being done in the manner in which many public education stakeholders advocated: at least a three-year moratorium on school performance scores during the transition period to new testing and curriculum changes. Instead, Superintendent White plans to ramp up testing and accountability quickly each year until 2025, when all schools are expected to score "mastery" in order to be considered an "A school." A detailed master-plan for ensuring success for all students, schools, communities, and districts statewide still has not been constructed.

Public schools rely upon the state for funding to make educational progress. It's disheartening that several of Louisiana's top education leaders continue to seek a path of privatization by forcing unneeded (and mostly unwanted) competition amongst public, charter, and private voucher schools. When three school systems are forced to use the same pot of money to function, Louisiana's students lose. If our public schools are forced to give up their already scarce financial resources to charter schools, educational quality in public schools will diminish. We need to adequately fund public schools to which all of Louisiana's students have access. We can't continue to lose our precious public schools—schools that constitutionally guarantee a free and appropriate education for every child.

It's important to note that the LAE commends efforts to increase graduation rates, and as the president of this organization, I congratulate any school successful in achieving this significant accomplishment, but it's important for the LaDOE to be transparent and fair in evaluating how such an achievement is assessed. It is my opinion that the LaDOE's Accountability Commission must do more to strengthen Louisiana's school accountability system. Instead of reflecting how students do on a single test at a single point in time, we should be looking at what our students are capable of producing over time, perhaps via a pretest/posttest system. This would give school systems a more accurate picture of student growth and what needs to be done to ascertain higher levels of student success.

In Solidarity,
Debbie Meaux
LAE President

LAE CHALLENGES IMPROPER USE OF MFP FUNDS

ILLEGAL USE OF MINIMUM FOUNDATION PROGRAM DOLLARS TO FUND CERTAIN CHARTER SCHOOLS SIPHONS MUCH-NEEDED DOLLARS AWAY FROM LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS



Leaders from LAE affiliates across the state have officially signed on to a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the state's use of Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) dollars to fund certain charter schools.

Brian Blackwell said the recent lawsuit, filed in September 2014, is an outgrowth of the 2012 voucher case.

"The 2012 lawsuit challenged the funding of private schools through the MFP," Blackwell said. "The latest suit challenges the funding of state-created schools through the MFP."

"The illegal use of MFP funds to pay for BESE-approved charter schools has had a devastating impact on city and parish school boards," said LAE President Debbie Meaux. "We must put an end to these unconstitutional practices so that local school boards receive the MFP funds that they need to educate all students in Louisiana."

In 2012, the Louisiana Supreme Court held that "once the minimum baseline for public education is met, the MFP funds must still be allocated equitably to city and parish school systems." This ruling follows the Louisiana Constitution, which unambiguously requires that MFP funds be allocated to city and parish schools.

Louisiana public schools are funded through the MFP, and the Louisiana Constitution requires that MFP funds be equitably allocated to "parish and city school systems." Despite this requirement, Louisiana's charter school demonstration programs law and the latest MFP resolution approved by the Louisiana Legislature require the payment of MFP funds to Type 1B and Type 2 charter schools. (Type 1B charter schools operate pursuant to a charter with a local charter authorizer; Type 2 charter schools operate pursuant to a charter with BESE.) Parish and city school systems have no control over Type 1B and/or Type 2 charter schools because neither of these types of schools are considered "parish and city school systems" under Article VIII, §13(B) of the Louisiana Constitution.

President Meaux went on to express that the association stands by the fact that charter schools approved by BESE or local charter authorizers are not city and parish school systems. All money appropriated by the legislature to go into the MFP must be allocated equitably among the 69 city and parish school systems in the state.

"The LAE has always considered school funding to be a top priority, which is why we chose to take legal action on the improper use of the funds," said Meaux. "This lawsuit will ensure that MFP funds are spent on what the people of the state wanted them to be spent on—city and parish school systems—not on state-approved charter schools that siphon scarce resources away from those systems."

The LAE successfully challenged the funding of voucher schools through the MFP formula in 2012. LAE Attorney

A decision is expected soon on whether to allow a permanent injunction on the allocation of MFP funds to Type 2 charter schools. LAE leaders will keep members posted on the outcome of this important issue.

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

Fifth Associational District, Seat C: Ascension, Assumption, Iberia, Lafayette, and St. James

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 laurie.guillot@lae.org, by January 15, 2015. The next LAE Board Meeting is scheduled for January 24 2015, and the seats will be appointed at this meeting.

SEVERAL BESE MEMBERS IGNORE RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCIL APPOINTED TO DECIDE HOW CERTAIN STATE DOLLARS WOULD FUND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The 8(g) Advisory Council was established earlier this year to make decisions on how Louisiana oil and gas dollars would be divvied up to fund the state's public school system for the 2015-16 school year. The council previously reached an agreement to eliminate special projects and competitive grant programs from the 8(g) program budget and move those funds to increase block grants and statewide program funding, but several members of the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) ignored the recommendations of the council. Superintendent White spoke against



the proposal, saying he didn't like the 8(g) Advisory Council's recommendation because it reduced the amount of funds flowing to the Louisiana Department of Education (LaDOE).

"Certain BESE members' decisions to go against the unanimous approval of a council specifically established to make decisions on how these funds would provide for the state's public school system is alarming; it proves how politics play a major role in Louisiana's education system," Meaux said. "It is very clear that BESE member Holly Boffy and State Superintendent of Education John White are working to promote their own special interests at the expense of all students in Louisiana."

Available 8(g) funds have decreased substantially over the past five years. From 2010 to 2014, total funds available have decreased from 42 million to 24.5 million. The 2014-15 8(g) program budget made a dramatic shift from block grants to more competitive grant programs, which caused major chaos on the equity of how projects were chosen. LAE representatives have been vocal opponents of the shift and have expressed concerns during several BESE meetings.

"While the LAE recognizes the complementary nature of competitive grants to spur innovation, our association

feels block grants provide a more solid foundation for the resources needed to ensure a quality education," Meaux said. "Block grants allow local education agencies to choose which programs in their community to fund, and these governance bodies are better able to identify where and how the money should be spent effectively at the local level."

Meaux went on to point out that the competitive grant process gives BESE ultimate control over how certain funds earmarked for the state's public education system are spent, which leads to the potential

favoritism and special treatment on the awarding of such grants. In addition, a competitive grant process may prevent certain local school districts with fewer resources the ability to provide or field compelling applications for such grants. Meaux said these are just a few examples of the unintended consequences of the competitive grant process.

After much debate, BESE ultimately approved a compromise motion offered by BESE member Walter Lee to move more funds to the block grants and statewide program funding. LAE leaders would like to thank the following members for voting in favor of this proposal: Lottie Beebe, Carolyn Hill, Walter Lee, Judith Miranti, Chas Roemer, and Jane Smith.

"Providing a consistent level of certainty to all local school districts through block grant aid offers stability in an otherwise rapidly deteriorating fiscal environment, particularly in the areas of early childhood programs, after-school programs, and technology," Meaux said. "Since all school districts could use extra financial security during this fiscally unsound time, we need to make sure supplemental funding opportunities are available to all schools through a fair and unbiased process."

WHAT DOES FOOTBALL HAVE TO DO WITH YOUR RETIREMENT ACCOUNT?



Teachers' Retirement System of Louisiana

It's December! For many Louisiana teachers, this means Thanksgiving, falling temperatures, and football!

At the Teachers' Retirement System of Louisiana (TRSL), members have an all-access pass to TRSL retirement information through TRSL's Online Member Access.

By logging in to Member Access, you can get the play-by-play of your personal TRSL retirement account, including your salary, contributions, service credit, and more.

Get your retirement game plan in motion! Sign up for Member Access today by visiting www.trsl.org/members.

Have a question about the Teachers' Retirement System of Louisiana you'd like to see answered in *The LAE Voice*? Contact kate.hyer@trsl.org, and we may feature your question in a future issue!

LAE EASY ENROLL:

ONLINE MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT SERVICE

HELP LAE SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT THE NEWEST SERVICE OFFERED TO PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS

Do you have a colleague who would like to become a member of Louisiana's largest professional organization for public school teachers and support staff? It's never been this easy to join the LAE! Prospective members can join the association from the comfort of their own homes through *LAE Easy Enroll*, LAE's new

online membership enrollment process. Remember, there's strength in numbers! Help LAE leaders spread the word by encouraging your colleagues to join the association online. All they have to do is go to www.lae.org and click the "Join Now" button to get started.



LAE HOLIDAY MEMBER BENEFIT TIDBIT

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

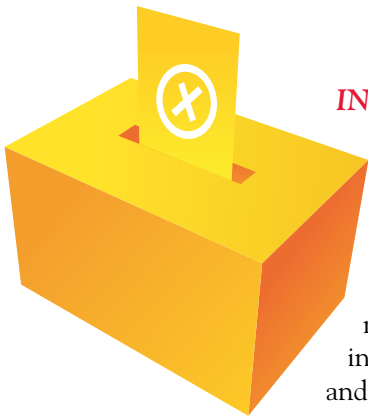
Don't forget to check out the NEA's Click-N-Save when doing your holiday shopping for savings that you only can receive as a member. Go to www.neamb.com and click on "NEA Click-N-Save" under "Discounts."

AVID READER?

Save an additional \$5 on more than 130 magazines. Buy them for a gift or for yourself! Your coupon code is *Happy Holidays*. Go to www.neamb.com and click on "Magazine Service" under "Discounts."

2015 ELECTIONS PROCEDURES

INTERESTED IN MAKING A DIFFERENCE WITHIN THE LAE? RUN FOR OFFICE!
CHECK OUT THE LAE'S 2015 ELECTIONS PROCEDURES BELOW.



1. An article in the November *LAE Voice* and posted on the LAE website will outline the nomination process and will include the election procedures and election calendar.
2. Nomination forms will be available on the LAE website, at the LAE Headquarters (candidates may call 800-256-4523), and emailed and mailed to local presidents and the board of directors in December.
3. Upon receipt of a candidate's nomination form, the LAE will verify receipt by email.
4. Notification of receipt of a candidate's form will occur within one day of receiving a nomination form, except during the Christmas holiday break. Nomination forms arriving during the holiday will be receipted on the date of the reopening of the office.
5. The email address for electronically forwarding nominations forms (laurie.guillot@lae.org) will be directed to the office of the executive director or her designee. All forms must be fully completed and in the LAE Headquarters office by January 7, 2015, by 11:59 p.m.
6. For reproduction purposes, photos will only be accepted by mail or email. Quality of the photo may be affected by email, in which case the committee authorizes the LAE to contact the candidate to request a usable photo.
7. Biographical information composed by the candidates, not to exceed 50 words, will be included with the election information/ballot. Bio information will be printed as submitted; it will not be edited for content or grammar.
8. Candidates are strongly recommended to contact the LAE if verification has not been received within one day of the expected arrival of the form at the LAE.
9. Candidates will be notified by email (by January 10th) when the nominations have been certified by the Elections Committee.
10. An article in *The LAE Voice* and on the LAE website will inform members of the scheduled elections. The article will contain the bios of candidates along with a sample ballot and voting instructions. Ballots will appear in the March issue of *The Voice* and will be posted in the Members-Only portion of the LAE website.
11. All voting will be online. Voting members will use their NEA ID assigned by the NEA when voting. (ID appears on the membership card issued by the LAE as well as every issue of *The LAE Voice* above the name of the member.)
12. A paper ballot can be available upon request from the neutral.
13. The first vote recorded by the neutral will be the one counted.
14. March 31 is the deadline for receipt of all ballots by the neutral.
15. The neutral will have the election results certified by a notary public. The certification is to be provided to the LAE Executive Director by overnight delivery. The Elections Committee will meet as scheduled to certify the election results. The committee will invite candidates or their representatives to be present during the certification of the results. Candidates will be notified by mail of the election results.
16. All candidates who receive a majority of the votes cast shall be certified as elected by the Elections Committee. Should no candidate receive a majority of the votes cast, a runoff will be held between the top two candidates.
17. Should a run-off election be necessary, members of the appropriate district will be notified electronically, and an announcement will appear in *The LAE Voice*.
18. After all election procedures and challenges have been followed, the Elections Committee will declare any unopposed candidate as the winner of the office sought. The ballot will not reflect any unopposed candidate.

2014 – 2015 ELECTIONS CALENDAR

2014

December 1: Nomination forms made available

2015

January 7: Nomination forms and attachments must be sent by mail or email by 11:59 p.m.

January 10: LAE Elections Committee certifies the candidate and mails notification letters.

January 16: Obtain database of voting members.

January 20: Deadline to challenge the certification of candidates. Challenges shall be made in writing and submitted by certified or registered mail.

February 8: Deadline for printing biographical information of candidates.

March 10: All ballots distributed.

March 31: Deadline for receipt of all ballots to neutral.

April 11: Report from the neutral to the Elections Committee. Notification of election results to the candidates.

April 22: Last day for candidates to withdraw from run-off election by notifying the executive director and sent by certified mail.

April 22: Deadline to challenge primary results. Challenges to the elections shall be made in writing to the executive director and sent by certified mail.

May 1: Election neutral mails ballots for run-off and special elections.

May 31: Deadline for receipt of all ballots to neutral.

June 8: Neutral reports results of run-off election to the Elections Committee. Notification of election results sent to candidates.

June 17: Deadline to challenge run-off election. Challenges to the election shall be made in writing and sent by certified mail.

LAE Elections Committee
c/o Executive Director
8322 One Calais Avenue
Baton Rouge, LA 70809
Email: laurie.guillot@lae.org

LOUISIANA'S TEACHER EVALUATION MECHANISM UNDER REVIEW

APPOINTED REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETS TO DETERMINE FUTURE OF SYSTEM

By LAE Government Relations Specialist Shane Riddle

During the 2014 Legislative Session, Louisiana lawmakers passed legislation to create a committee to review the state's teacher evaluation system, also known as COMPASS. This group, referred to as the Act 240 subcommittee, recently met to begin examining the overall effectiveness of the system. Committee members heard testimony from concerned educators and considered recommendations for changes to BESE policy and state laws surrounding the value-added model (VAM) portion of the system.

During meetings, several committee members reported receiving hundreds of emails from teachers and principals across the state offering their opinions regarding VAM. Feedback was almost unanimous in expressing the inaccuracy of VAM evaluations. Among their concerns, educators explained several problems with the way VAM scores portray the performance of core-subject (math and ELA) teachers. Using VAM scores instead of student learning targets (SLTs) to evaluate core-subject teachers places them at risk of getting inaccurate evaluation scores. Statistics show that 60 percent of teachers whose quantitative evaluations are determined by SLTs scored highly effective; the Department of Education allows only 20 percent of VAM teachers to be rated as highly-effective. Several members of the committee confirmed the detriment of these inaccuracies by pointing out that it's becoming more and more difficult to get teachers to teach math and language arts. Educators also found an issue with the subjective nature of the VAM quota system. Since the system is arbitrary, it never rewards the teaching force as a whole for improved student performance. The group also considered research findings showing that there is only a 46 percent chance that a teacher who scores in the highly-effective range of the VAM the first year will remain there the second year. This percentage takes into account the teacher using the same instructional methods from year to year. Researchers Schochet and Chiang conducted analysis for the U.S. Department of Education and found that there was about a 25 percent chance that an average teacher would be misidentified as far below average if using three years of VAM estimates. If using one year

of VAM data, like Louisiana, the probability increased to a 35 percent chance. This empirically demonstrates that, when VAM scores are applied in practice, a teacher might have a one in four chance of being misclassified using three years of data and a one in three chance of being misclassified using one year of data.

It is becoming clear that the ranking system that determines a teacher's final VAM score is inappropriate because it always dooms 10 percent of teachers to an ineffective VAM score each year even if student performance improves from one year to the next—this defeats the purpose of the whole evaluation system. In addition, many special education teachers and teachers from alternative schools are concerned with the COMPASS rubric's lack of consideration for the special-needs student sector. The one-size-fits-all approach of COMPASS does not even come close to measuring effectiveness for the teachers of special needs students.

It is becoming increasingly evident that all aspects of the VAM are unreliable and unfair, not to mention that almost 70 percent of teachers are not even VAM-eligible, and those who are run the risk of being misclassified. These extreme issues prove that the Louisiana teacher evaluation system must be seriously re-examined and re-constructed to make more fair, reliable, and unbiased determinations about teacher quality. Even Representative Frank Hoffmann, the sponsor of the legislation enacting the evaluation system (Act 54), said that he felt that a teacher should not lose professional credibility, as well as certain job rights (due process) based on one ineffective rating.

The committee will meet again in December to continue their study. The Senate Education Committee has also scheduled a meeting to receive an update on the activities of the committee. LAE representatives will attend both meetings to voice the concerns of members. Be sure to check www.lae.org for updates on this issue that stands to affect educators across the state.

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Louisiana Association of Educators
8322 One Calais Avenue
Baton Rouge, LA 70809

Phone: 225-343-9243
Toll Free: 1-800-256-4523
Fax: 225-343-9272
www.lae.org
Help Desk: 1-877-452-3477
helpdesk@lae.org

Debbie Meaux, President
Lynda Guidry, Interim Executive Director

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UPCOMING EVENTS



12/5-12/6:
LAE Executive
Committee/
Board Meeting

12/22-1/5:
Winter
Break

1/24:
LAE Board
Meeting