

Report on Education Accountability in Louisiana
May 2, 2024
For additional information contact Michael Deshotels
Louisianaeducator@gmail.com
Phone: 225-235-1632

Introduction: Louisiana's efforts at education accountability for K-12 public schools began over 40 years ago with laws designed to produce student competency in basic subjects in mathematics, reading, science and social studies. National student testing had revealed that Louisiana students were performing near the bottom of the ranking of the states in basic academic skills. Business leaders and legislators wanted to ensure that the awarding of a high school diploma was an indicator of real academic achievement. A related issue has been a push by the Legislature and BESE to reduce dropouts and improve the high school graduation rate. Louisiana tackled both issues by adopting sweeping accountability reforms that have been periodically revised and fine-tuned by the legislature and BESE. After over 40 years of accountability reform, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is considering further revision of accountability standards. This report analyzes the results of efforts by the Louisiana legislature and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in setting objective academic standards and enforcing accountability of education stakeholders in meeting those standards. It should be considered in making further changes.

The major findings of this report:

- **The push to increase the Louisiana graduation rate has overshadowed all efforts to establish objective standards for promotion and graduation.**
- **Takeover of schools by the state has done little to improve academic results.**
- **Charter schools serving underprivileged students produce high expenditures for management but few results in the classroom.**
- **Achievement of students granted vouchers declines when they transfer to private schools.**
- **The lack of enforcement of classroom discipline undermines the education of all.**
- **The school accountability system now demands little of parents and students.**
- **Current state test scores tell us little about the amount of learning of our students.**
- **Grading and ranking schools by school performance scores does little to improve the education of underprivileged students.**
- **The shift to college prep for all has resulted in mediocrity for all.**
- **Real potential for student improvement depends on continued efforts by BESE and the present State Superintendent to reduce student truancy, expand career diploma programs and early childhood education focusing on effective reading instruction.**

Louisiana School accountability efforts

Student promotion: The first major education reform legislation in Louisiana was designed to set objective academic standards as a requirement for student promotion from one grade to the next. Many educators and legislators had long felt that standards for promotion in public schools had been eroded to the point that many students were entering high school and even graduating without gaining proficiency in their basic courses in English, math, science, and social studies. Business leaders complained of high school graduates applying for jobs who could not read or do

simple math. The initial standards law required that students pass state tests in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, particularly in grades 4 and 8, as a requirement for promotion to the next grade. LRS17: 24.4 A (2-3) states the following:

"(2) The Louisiana Educational Assessment Program" means a process of measuring pupil performance in relation to grade appropriate skills, state content standards, and national educational indices.

(3) "Pupil progression plan" means the comprehensive plan developed and adopted by each parish or city school board which shall be based on student performance on the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program with goals and objectives which are compatible with the Louisiana Competency-Based Education Program and which supplements the minimum standards approved by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. A pupil progression plan shall require the student's mastery of grade-appropriate skills before he or she can be recommended for promotion.

Classroom Discipline: There was also a major concern in the legislature about the lack of proper discipline and order in many classrooms that interfered with effective classroom instruction. In response to this problem, legislation was approved in Louisiana during the 1990's that gave teachers authority to discipline unruly students in the classroom and to have students who were disrupting orderly instruction temporarily removed from the classroom. The discipline law: LSRS 17:416 A. (1)(c)(i): stated in part the following: *"When a student's behavior prevents the orderly instruction of other students or poses an immediate threat to the safety or physical well-being of any student or teacher or when a student violates the school's code of conduct, the teacher may have the student immediately removed from his classroom and placed in the custody of the principal or his designee."*

School and District Accountability: A third major effort aimed at improving education results in Louisiana started just before hurricane Katrina devastated the New Orleans region in August of 2005. The accountability law: LRS 17:10.1 states in part the following:

"In addition to any other performance-related labels or designations assigned to public schools and school districts pursuant to the school and district accountability system, the state board, in consultation with parents, teachers, school administrators, and other education stakeholders, shall develop a letter grade system reflective of school and district performance that shall include but not necessarily be limited to the following:

(1)(a) Assignment of a letter grade to each public elementary and secondary school and school district that is based upon the current method of determining school and district performance scores.

(b) Any school that has been labeled academically unacceptable shall be assigned a grade of "F".

State Takeover of Schools: The accountability law was used to rank public schools and district school systems primarily based on the academic achievement of students in required subjects as measured by state testing. The Louisiana legislature, based on these school rankings, approved a law allowing the Louisiana State Department of Education to take over the lowest performing schools from parish school boards and place them in a state Recovery District with the responsibility of significantly improving student performance (LRS 17:10.5). The plan was to upgrade the schools before they could be returned to their local school systems.

Approval of Charter Schools: Another innovation approved by the legislature was the Charter school law (LRS: 17:3973) allowing the creation of several types of publicly funded charter schools to be formed throughout the state, either approved by the local school boards or by direct approval of the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Most of the original charter schools were created as part of the school takeover effort. Schools in New Orleans and several other parishes that were deemed to be “failing schools” were taken over as type 5 charter schools and placed in a special “Recovery District”. It was generally assumed that once these schools were “fixed” by the Recovery District they could be returned to their original school boards.

Private school voucher students: The Louisiana legislature also approved a law allowing parents to transfer students in low scoring public schools (often referred to as “failing schools”) to private and parochial schools using a voucher system. Accountability for voucher students was to be maintained by requiring all voucher students to continue taking the state LEAP tests. The state could therefore monitor the performance of students who transferred to private schools at public expense.

Results of the Louisiana Accountability Movement: The following analysis attempts to answer several questions about the various school reforms that were implemented over the past 40 years as part of the Louisiana accountability movement.

Accountability Issue #1: Has Louisiana been successful in establishing standards for student promotion from one grade to the next?

The effort to ensure that students are achieving acceptable and measurable results in their basic courses as a requirement for promotion began as far back as 1980. Louisiana law LRS 17:24.4 B states the following: *“the Louisiana Legislature, shall begin the Louisiana Competency-Based Education Program, and the recommended effective date shall be January 1, 1980”* The law also states very clearly the following: *“A pupil progression plan shall require the student's mastery of grade-appropriate skills before he or she can be recommended for promotion.”*

The Louisiana Competency Based Education law cited above, required that students be tested using a state developed testing program to determine whether students had mastered the required material in certain courses (English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) as a requirement for promotion from one grade to another, particularly from grade 4 to grade 5 and grade 8 to grade 9.

The law also provided several approaches to achieving student competency, including remediation (improvement plans), summer school, and grade retention. Except for students with disabilities, all students were ultimately expected to pass the state tests as a requirement for promotion. It is very clear that after over 40 years of attempts to achieve these academic standards, a large percentage of Louisiana students are still being promoted from one grade to the next without achieving competence or even basic level performance. (See the study of student test failures in Exhibit 1 attached at the end of this report.) This study conducted using data

supplied by the Louisiana Department of Education in response to a public records request shows that not only are large numbers of students promoted when they fail two or more of their state LEAP tests, but many are promoted year after year after repeatedly failing two or more of their 4 required annual tests. For example, for the first year of the study, 35% (19,559) of the 55,700 public school 4th grade students failed at least two of their 4th grade state tests. That year 92% of students who failed at least half of their state 4th grade tests were promoted to the next grade. In tracking these students, we find that 13,263 failed two or more tests for the second year. There is apparently no requirement for promoted students to ever retake and pass the state tests they failed. This seems to be a violation of the original intent of the Competency-based law.

It is not surprising; therefore, that when Louisiana students are tested using the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) test, only 27% of 8th graders in 2022 were determined to be proficient in English and only 19% were proficient in mathematics.

It is evident that the push to improve Louisiana's graduation rate has taken precedence over the enforcement of objective standards for promotion.

Accountability Issue # 2: Classroom Discipline: Are teachers receiving the support they need in maintaining an orderly and productive classroom environment for learning?

How does student classroom discipline compare to other industrialized countries?

Answer: Many teachers in Louisiana have left the teaching profession because of frustration over chronically disruptive students and disrespect of the teacher by many students. State laws authorizing teachers to have disruptive students temporarily removed from their classrooms are often ignored. By comparison, the countries that have produced good academic performance by their students strictly enforce behavior in their classrooms. Asian countries (Korea, Japan, and many others) often have pupil teacher ratios twice as large as the U. S. classrooms with their students held to strict compliance with discipline rules. Several years ago when Philippine teachers were brought to Louisiana to help relieve the teacher shortage, they were shocked and appalled at the disrespect shown by students for teachers. The program was discontinued.

In Louisiana, the pressure to improve the graduation rate and reduce the suspension rate in public school often results in allowing disruptive students to violate discipline rules repeatedly without appropriate consequences. Many teachers fear physical harm from unruly students. Teachers are expected to produce improved academic results by some students that are uncooperative, unmotivated to learn the required curriculum, and disrespectful of their teachers. Such students usually have high absentee and truancy rates. Teachers are also expected to provide remediation to students who are promoted even if they fail state tests repeatedly, and at the same time, teach them new material at the level required by the state standards. It is no wonder that many teachers have resigned or retired early in recent years, causing a serious teacher shortage in Louisiana.

Accountability issue #3: School and District Accountability and state takeover of schools:

Has the takeover of failing public schools resulted in better student performance and greater accountability?

Based on state testing, New Orleans student performance in 2005 ranked near the bottom of all district systems. The remedy approved by the legislature was a special law allowing the State Department of Education to take over all schools in the Orleans public school system that were

performing below the state average. That allowed the State to take over 102 of the 108 public schools in Orleans Parish starting with the 2005-06 school year. These schools were to be overseen by a special division of the State Department of Education called The Recovery District.

The plan approved for school improvement by the State Board of Education for New Orleans was to allow independent organizations called charter school boards to use state and local tax dollars to take over schools in an effort to significantly improve student achievement. School takeovers by the Recovery District were also approved in East Baton Rouge, Pointe Coupee, St Helena and Caddo. The newly organized schools would be judged primarily by their success in raising student test scores in English language arts and math. If the new charter school management boards succeeded according to such measures they would be allowed to keep control of the schools. The deal with the charter management boards was that some state regulations would be waived for such charter schools by the state in return for improved performance on academic tests by students. Supporters of charter schools hoped that such schools would have less bureaucracy, less political interference by school board members, and more emphasis on learning.

After 11 years of the school takeovers in New Orleans, a state law was passed in 2016 (LRS 17:10.7.1) that allowed the takeover schools in New Orleans to be returned to the Parish school board while retaining charter schools as operators of most schools. Now that almost 20 years has passed since these school take-overs, the obvious question the public should ask is: “Has the privatization of many schools in Louisiana resulted in improved academic performance for students?”

What is the present-day performance of students in takeover schools and students who transferred to private schools using vouchers? The latest report on school performance scores indicates that 50 out of the existing 61 schools in New Orleans are still performing below the state average. So, by the original standard used for takeover of New Orleans schools, only 11 of the current New Orleans schools are performing at an acceptable level. If we used the pre-Katrina criteria for school takeover by the state, 50 out of 61 schools would again need to be taken over by the state.

One of the major justifications for changing Orleans schools into charter schools was that reformers thought that the old New Orleans school system was top heavy with administration, too political, and did not have enough emphasis on students and the classroom. Proponents of going to a charter system believed that putting the emphasis primarily on classroom achievement would be a more efficient use of tax dollars.

Did the new system of charters improve efficiency? The independent Pelican Institute recently found that in 2020-21 New Orleans spent \$30,000 per student while the state average is only \$13,400 per student. Of that \$30,000, Orleans spent 26% on administration and 31% on instruction. *Note: Because of the high-profile innovative nature of the “all charter” New Orleans school system, many Orleans schools have attracted generous funding from foundations and charitable groups.* The state average for schools that are publicly managed by traditional school boards in Louisiana is 8% spent on administration and 56% spent on instruction. Yet the Pelican

Institute found that Orleans students in 2021 ranked 57th out of the 69 school systems in math and 46th in reading. Only 16% of the Orleans Middle schools had their 8th grade students achieving mastery in math. It certainly does not look like the all-charter system in New Orleans is more efficient in producing academic results, even though it is now lavishly funded compared to the regular school systems. *Note: For the 2023 state testing, Orleans 8th grade students performed as follows: 65% failed math, 54% failed science, and 54% failed Social Studies.* This begs the question: Should BESE and the Legislative auditor review administrative salaries and administrative vs teacher staffing ratios in Orleans?

What about public school students attending low performing schools who were allowed to transfer to private schools? A study by the Fordham Institute titled “*Louisiana’s voucher program and student achievement*” found that Louisiana public school students who were allowed to transfer to private schools using vouchers performed at a lower level than they were doing in their original public schools. *See also the attached table in exhibit #2 that compares the average scores of “scholars” (voucher students) with the average for all public-school students.* Even so, there is now a push in the legislature to allow any student to attend private school at taxpayer expense.

Several of the Recovery District schools outside of New Orleans were returned to local school boards even though they were still rated as failing schools. The few takeover schools that remain in the Recovery District are still struggling.

It is clear that there has not been a great benefit to students that were included in school takeovers by private organizations and transfers of students to private schools at state expense.

Has the overall performance of public schools in Louisiana improved significantly since 2005?

Answer: Using national testing of student performance in reading and math, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, we can compare overall student performance in the Spring 2005 NAEP testing to the latest NAEP testing which occurred in the Spring of 2022. In 2005, 20% of Louisiana 8th grade students were deemed to be proficient in Reading. In 2022, 27% were deemed to be proficient in Reading. In 2005, 16% of Louisiana 8th grade students were proficient in math. In 2022, the math proficiency has increased to 19%. These are not large improvements, but there is some progress.

The state testing of students which is done every year in grades 3 through 12, is required by law to be compatible with the NAEP testing. However, comparison of the state and national testing seems to indicate that state test results have been inflated in recent years.

For example, in 2023 Louisiana LEAP testing indicated that 44% of 4th grade students had achieved proficiency in English, but the NAEP test the year before found only 28% to be proficient.

In math for the same year and grade, LEAP indicated that 37% of 4th graders were proficient, but the NAEP found only 27% proficient.

The 8th grade results had similar disagreement between state testing and national testing.

Louisiana has spent hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars on education reform that has produced unacceptable results as measured by the very tests that were used to justify the reforms. Also, state promotion policies have been modified under the previous administration to allow students who fail their state tests to be promoted to the next grade simply by the prescription of a remediation plan in failed subjects that may or may not produce actual academic results. Even though a high percentage of remediated students continue to fail their state tests, such students are rarely denied promotion to succeeding grades.

Does the present method of reporting student test scores to the public provide sufficient transparency about the actual learning of required material?

Answer: The method used for reporting state student test results developed by the previous administration is misleading. Louisiana sets very low *raw passing scores* for state LEAP and high school End-of-Course tests. For some tests, the percentage of correct answers needed to pass state tests are set at levels that can almost be achieved by making random guesses on the multiple-choice questions. These very low raw passing scores are concealed by converting them to scale scores and then reporting only scale scores to the public. For example, the minimum passing scale score on the 8th grade math test is reported as a scale score of 725 out of a total possible 850 points, even though it represents only 26% correct answers. *(See exhibit # 2. For a table that converts average scale scores of students back to the actual percentage of correct answers achieved for the 2022-23 school year.)*

Did the switching to a college-prep curriculum improve student performance?

Starting in 2012, Louisiana switched its K-12 curriculum to a mostly college-prep curriculum. This was done in response to a national movement promoted by the providers of the SAT. The SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) is a testing program used as a major part of the requirements for entry into elite private colleges and many major universities. This new curriculum referred to as “The Common Core State Standards”, mostly focusing on math and English language arts, was supposed to prepare students to make higher scores on the SAT, thereby boosting the percentage of students prepared to earn a college degree. (The Common Core State Standards were adopted and then modified slightly and rebranded as Louisiana standards) The performance of Louisiana students on the new standards was measured by a new system of testing of all students in grades 3 through 12. These new standards had never been field tested to determine their effectiveness, yet they were applied to millions of students across the nation. Most states adopted the new standards sight-unseen based on the promises of higher academic achievement made by the promoters of the new standards. The cheerleaders for the new standards included philanthropist Bill Gates, many leaders of industry and the U. S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, under President Obama. The Louisiana State Superintendent and the members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in 2011 were convinced by the promoters of the Common Core Standards that this new curriculum would prepare most Louisiana students for success in college and even help underprivileged students to close the achievement gap.

Results: All this emphasis on the new college prep curriculum has not yielded significant results in proficiency, nor has it significantly improved Louisiana’s ranking compared to other states. In 2011 (before implementation of the new standards), the National Assessment of Education progress test found that only 22% of Louisiana 8th students were rated proficient in reading and

22% proficient in math. The most recent NAEP testing in 2022, found that 27% of Louisiana 8th grade students were proficient in reading but only 19 % were proficient in math. This amounts to a small improvement in English and a decline in math performance. Many educators in Louisiana feel that for math, the new standards and teaching methods for Common Core math are ineffective and almost useless to many of our students.

How has Louisiana enforced the law that required proficiency in basic subjects before students could be recommended for promotion to the next grade?

Answer: The effort to end social, or automatic promotion of students has always allowed many exceptions. Students with disabilities are allowed to be promoted to the succeeding grade even though failing state tests because of federal and state laws that allow students with disabilities to be promoted based on individual educational plans designed specifically to address their disabilities. After the state test requirement was set for promotion from grades 4 and 8, many regular students who failed state tests were allowed by BESE to attend summer school as an alternative for promotion to the next grade. As many students chose not to attend summer school or were denied promotion based on unsatisfactory results on state tests, upper grade classrooms became filled with overaged students who often presented discipline and bullying problems to other students. At the same time, legislative mandates demanded improvement of Louisiana's graduation rate. Studies by the state education department blamed grade retention of students for causing many overage students to drop out of school. As a result, new policies adopted by BESE greatly reduced objective requirements for promotion. The state still retains its high academic standards on paper, but such standards are rarely enforced by denying students promotion.

How did this happen to Louisiana education? A reform-minded state superintendent (John White) had been appointed in 2012 with the major goal of raising school standards to prepare more students for college. Superintendent White had been strongly supported by the business community as he promised to raise student performance standards. White had repeatedly claimed that the major cause of students' low academic performance was because of low expectations by educators. As a move to raise expectations, White often pointed out that his administration had implemented higher standards in the Louisiana public schools. White had also implemented a system of teacher evaluation based on improvement of student test scores. But there is no evidence that after 11 years of the new college prep standards that Louisiana students are performing better. In fact, now, many students in the upper grades and in high school, score no better on state tests than could be attained by random guessing on the multiple-choice questions. There has been no measurable improvement in test scores except for a small improvement in English language arts probably because of recent emphasis on early childhood education. At the same time Superintendent White was claiming to raise academic standards, he was quietly approving policies that encouraged student promotion without regard to low academic performance. A key phrase in present BESE policy that allows students to be promoted from one grade to the next allows schools to use "a preponderance of evidence" of academic achievement rather than state tests as the criteria for promotion.

What has this policy produced? In 2023, 53% of eighth graders failed their math test even though the passing score was set at only 26 % correct answers. 30% of eighth graders failed their English/language arts test even though the passing score was set at only 34%. Testing in other subjects and grades produced similar results. (See exhibit # 1 for average scores in grades 3-8)

Promotion of many students today is certainly not based on student proficiency on state tests as was originally intended by the legislature. Today, many students who miss far more than the minimum days of school attendance required for school credit and who fail several of their state tests, still get promoted to the next grade. Recently the legislature dropped the requirement for summer school for students who fail their state tests. Students who fail high school end-of-course tests now are allowed to take credit recovery courses that may not require students to actually learn the required material. The graduation rate in Louisiana was increased by giving almost any individual who spent 12 years in the K-12 system a diploma. The present state superintendent and the present BESE are trapped by a system of state mandated tests that are not relevant to more than half of our students and that have not produced the gains that were predicted for students. Strict enforcement of the test standards would tank the graduation rate.

The previous administration had suggested that as students and teachers adapted to the new Common Core based standards, the state test scores would improve, and the achievement gap between privileged and underprivileged would be reduced. This change has not occurred. In recent years, almost all students in Louisiana are awarded a high school diploma just for attending school for 12 years. The White administration had raised academic standards but had removed almost all consequences for failure to achieve those standards even though state law still states that *“Fourth and eighth grade students shall be required to demonstrate proficiency on such tests in order to advance to grades five and nine,”*

A more effective reform, started by White and greatly enhanced by Superintendent Brumley, has been the addition of career-based apprenticeship programs, dual enrollment with colleges, industry-based certification programs and progress toward various associate degrees for students in high school. But the effectiveness of this career choice program has been hindered by the low standards for promotion and the continued push to improve the graduation rate. Unfortunately, many students are opting out of vocational training because it is easier to just sit through the academic (college prep) courses that have no real standards for promotion and graduation.

Because 98% of students are promoted each year, even though approximately 35% of Louisiana public school students fail two or more of their state tests each year, parents are not alerted to the fact that their child is not learning the required material taught in Louisiana schools. There is little incentive for parents to insist that their child do homework and study for tests if he/she continues being promoted each year without regard to low academic performance and poor attendance. In countries that lead the world in academic achievement, standards are strictly enforced, and parents insist that their children spend many hours outside of school doing homework and studying for exams. The accountability movement in Louisiana has not improved students' academic skills, but it has taught them that they can get rewarded with a diploma even if they have not earned it. A welder whose welds don't pass certain standards as measured by x-ray testing will not be allowed to continue employment as a welder. Most jobs require objective levels of performance in order for an individual to remain employed. Automatic promotion and the awarding of diplomas without academic accomplishment are not making students accountable, nor are they preparing students for the world of work.

Are students in Louisiana getting what they need in preparation for life from the K-12 school system?

Answer: In Louisiana and many other states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards, the majority of students are not getting the life skills they need from the new school curriculum. For example, many children in Louisiana are overweight or obese because of unhealthy fast-food diets and are not getting the physical exercise their body needs to be healthy. Much of health and physical education in our schools has been reduced so that more time can be spent on inappropriate academic standards. Children are learning very little in school about how to live a healthy lifestyle. It is significant that Louisiana has the second highest rate of diabetes in the nation, and many students are diabetic before they graduate.

A major problem for students in Louisiana has been the insistence of reform leaders that all students receive a college prep education even though the Louisiana Board of Regents recently estimated that only 18% of 9th graders will go on to receive a college degree. Why do some school reform leaders keep insisting that all children need more college prep when most of them will never attend college while we continue to neglect teaching students how to prepare for good careers that do not require college? Many children are getting little training in working with tools, little training in money management, little training in childcare, and little training on the prevention of drug, alcohol, and tobacco abuse. The math they are expected to learn under the present standards has little use in everyday life, and many children graduate with shockingly poor reading and writing skills.

The present lack of enforced standards means that parents of children who fail their classroom work and state tests, are never required to face the academic deficiencies of their children. The majority of students entering high school today have little understanding of the math and science we now require in public high schools. Very few students are learning how to be responsible citizens. All the present emphasis on college prep has left little time for teaching vocational and useful life skills.

Public school students today are often compared to students whose parents can afford to send them to private schools that purposely select the most motivated and privileged students while enforcing strict discipline and the shedding of low performers. This report has made the point that public school educators seem to have their hands tied in enforcing discipline and academic standards. At the same time, our system today humiliates the administrators and teachers in public schools serving high poverty students by assigning failing grades to their schools. Why do we use our accountability system to punish the staff of schools that need the most encouragement and support for serving underprivileged students? The assignment of a grade of "F" and even the takeover of such schools has not produced better results. Will the revision of accountability standards address such issues?

Recommendations:

Wishful thinking about eventual success using the present curriculum should be suspended until an objective evaluation is made. BESE should request a detailed report from the Department of Education tracking all students who fail two or more of their LEAP tests starting in 4th grade up to high school for at least the last 6 years. The report should include the number and percentage

of students who have failed two or more LEAP tests for one year, then for two years in a row, or even 3 years in a row. How many and what percentage of such students are promoted each year and in successive years while failing two or more LEAP tests. How many and what percentage of students who fail LEAP tests are not complying with minimum school attendance requirements? What percentage of students who fail two or more LEAP tests also have unacceptable classroom behavior records? Are students who consistently fail LEAP tests in elementary and middle school enrolling in career (non-college prep) courses in high school or are they allowed to continue in a college prep track while they continue to produce failing scores in tested areas? Are college prep students who perform at unacceptable levels on the ACT still awarded a diploma? BESE should then consider revisions in promotion standards that address these problems. Much more should be done to enlist the participation of parents in enforcing standards and truly raising expectations for student performance.

This report has focused on the failings of an ill-conceived and poorly researched accountability system in Louisiana that is not preparing enough students for a good life. Even so, this observer has witnessed many great success stories about individual students who have benefited greatly from their public-school experience. These success stories usually happen because of student-teacher interactions that inspire students to succeed and flourish in school. The success stories often depend on teachers who are great role models and who take the time to recognize student potential and make extraordinary efforts to guide students to success. Success in school should not be limited to college prep. Schools should encourage many different careers requiring different career pathways and make a constant effort to develop the unlimited potential and interests of our children.

BESE and Superintendent Brumley have begun in recent years to achieve success by focusing in 3 public school reform areas that should continue to be emphasized. These include the increased emphasis on reducing truancy rates through the STAR task force, the increased emphasis on non-college prep career development programs and the push for early childhood education with its emphasis on development of reading skills in all children. This analysis has already discussed the efforts to provide many productive career paths and the push to reduce truancy as addressed by the STAR committee. Much more consideration should be given to programs that focus intensively on reading and vocabulary development.

Reading skills are the most fundamental of all skills that lead to academic success for children. Studies have shown that extensive reading helps to develop higher order functions of the brain especially if reading and writing instruction begin at early ages. Critical vocabulary development occurs as children learn the meaning of new words by their context in their reading material. Age-appropriate books with extensive use of illustrations are the best way to encourage development of reading skills in children. When parents and other role models read to and with children, reading proficiency develops, in addition to healthy social bonding rewards for children and parents. Parents should be warned however, about allowing children excessive use of smartphones for social media or gaming purposes. These are not a substitute for reading from real books or doing research using electronic media.

BESE should consider launching programs that encourage the business community to help supply age-appropriate books to children that they can take home where parents can help by

reading to and with their children. The only requirement for parents whose children receive free-take-home books should be a commitment by parents to read to and with their children. Illustrated reading materials can even be extended to comic books that have been developed based on classic novels where children are exposed to great literature in a way that also encourages the development of reading skills and vocabulary.

The curriculum in our public schools should be revised to account for the great diversity of abilities and interests of our students. There should be changes in the curriculum that focus on more practical applications of math and science, more motivational reading and writing, and more emphasis on real life skills, and career skills.

Improved classroom discipline, and respect for teachers would certainly produce better academic and real-life results. Discipline laws and teacher rights to remove excessively disruptive, disrespectful, and dangerous students should be enforced in all schools. Teachers who are denied such authority should be allowed to file grievances with appropriate protection from job loss for utilizing such rights and authority.

Louisiana should eliminate any accountability requirements that rate schools in high poverty areas as “failing” based mostly on student test scores. The data collected over the years shows that student performance is determined much more by socio-economic status than by the type of school attended. Schools should be evaluated based on efforts to provide students with role models, preferably of their own culture and racial identity, with which students could identify as inspiration for a successful and happy life.

Starting at approximately the sixth grade, students should be exposed to many different high demand careers including college-trained careers, vocational-technical and career skills. By the 8th grade, parents and students should choose a general career pathway, a variety of which should be offered by all schools. No parent should be forced to enroll their child in either a college prep or a vocational prep program, but whatever pathway is chosen should include objective passing standards. If a student cannot or is not willing to meet promotion standards, he/she should be given an opportunity to choose a different career pathway or repeat the grade or course failed. No career pathway should be a free ride. All career pathways of the future should have objective standards for promotion.

In high school, students should be encouraged to take dual enrollment courses in cooperation with community colleges, vocational/technical schools, and 4-year colleges in alignment with various career majors. Students should take dual enrollment and Advanced Placement courses for college prep and industry certification for vocational prep. All courses should have objective, measurable, standards for receiving a passing grade. Students choosing college prep should be required to make a reasonable minimum score on the ACT as well as passing appropriate end-of-course tests in order to graduate with college prep credentials. Students enrolled in vocational technical and industrial training should take math, science and English courses that align with the career goals of their major. All students should be expected to pass courses in civics and history to earn either a technical (career prep) or college prep diploma. There should be similar career opportunities with appropriate standards for students who choose art, music and performing arts.