

HIGH VALUE HIGH SCHOOLS FOR LOUISIANA

Investing in Futures

A funny thing happened over the last 100 years—our nation has changed. Our economy has changed. Our culture has changed. Technology has changed. Unfortunately, the high schools that prepare our young people to take on this new world have remained pretty much the same for the past 100 years. Today businesses require a different kind of graduate, one prepared for success from day one in a more global and technologically based marketplace.

High Value High Schools for Louisiana is an initiative to transform the high school experience so that it properly prepares our young men and women to be successful in the next step of their lives. By making this investment in Louisiana's young people, we're also making an investment in the future of our state, in the form of a quality workforce that will allow us to compete in the increasingly competitive global economy.



READY FOR THE NEXT STEP: College and Career Readiness for all Students

Ultimately, the value of a high school comes down to how well it prepares its students to succeed in the next steps of their lives. Whether students plan to attend post-secondary school (technical school, community college or a four-year college or university) or enter the workforce right out of high school, they need to acquire discernable skills that will allow them to compete on the next level. These skills go beyond traditional academic skills like reading, math and science. Thinking skills, interpersonal skills, personal qualities and technology skills all play a crucial role in determining whether a student will succeed on the next level.

Key Goals to Create High Value High Schools:

- Reduce dropouts and increase our high-school graduation rate.
- Increase students' readiness for postsecondary education.
- Increase career readiness of students.
- Increase participation in postsecondary education.
- Reduce failure rates in middle grades and ninth grade.
- Increase the number of students meeting grade-level standards.

How We Can Reach These Goals:

- Keep students engaged with increasingly **relevant** subject matter.
- Challenge students by gradually increasing the **rigor** of high schools.
- Create stronger **relationships** between students and their teachers and administrators.
- Ease the **transition** to ninth grade and to postsecondary study and careers.
- Create a **school leadership team** that focuses on constant improvement of classroom practices.
- Form **partnerships** with businesses, postsecondary schools and community organizations to achieve key goals.
- Reshape **career/technical studies** as classrooms and labs where students use academic skills to complete real-world assignments.

Areas to address for HIGH VALUE HIGH SCHOOLS

1

WHILE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IS RISING, THE WORK HAS JUST BEGUN

Louisiana's accountability system has already raised the levels of achievement of high schools in our state. Thirty-nine Louisiana public high schools were recognized in 2008 for their exceptional performance.¹ Benjamin Franklin High School in New Orleans received a gold award and was ranked the 16th best high school in the United States.²

Despite these encouraging models of success, they remain the exception as they only represent 10 percent of the high schools in Louisiana. Even more discouraging is that 20 percent of students who master the eighth grade LEAP test end up dropping out of high school. A more engaging high school experience will challenge students to continue to exceed their own expectations.

2

EXPANDING INITIATIVES THAT HAVE PROVEN TO REDUCE DROPOUTS

Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) – JAG is a nationally recognized program to address students who are at risk of dropping out of school. Students participating in this program are mentored toward earning a diploma or a GED, a work-ready skills certificate, a marketable skill, and work experience. Louisiana currently operates 40 JAG programs in 22 parishes, all with exceptional results (job placements from the program are between 92% and 94%).

Career Readiness Certification and GED – The existing PreGED/Skills Options Program is not achieving results with approximately 5% of enrolled students receiving a GED. If students elect to leave the High School pathways to pursue a GED pathway, the student must pursue a National Work Ready Certification Program and GED.

Quality Alternative Education – In order to achieve High Value High Schools, we must include high quality programs for suspended and expelled students to ensure that those that probably need the most attention aren't left without options to succeed.

3

A DIPLOMA THAT MEANS SOMETHING

Raising graduation rates is only relevant if the education students are receiving is of a high quality. There must be consistency among high school experiences across the state so that every diploma issued throughout the state indicates a student's college or career readiness. A Louisiana high school diploma should serve as a clear message to both colleges and businesses that Louisiana graduates have the skills to be successful.

¹ See the attached Summary of the awards given by U.S. News and World Report, 2008.

² Ibid.

4

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

No two students are exactly alike, so High Value High Schools must be flexible in offering several pathways for students to succeed. Whether students want to go to a four-year college or university, community college, technical school or if they want to enter the workforce directly after high school, each student must be offered a course of study that adequately prepares them for the next step of their lives.

5

ESTABLISH READINESS FOR THE NINTH GRADE

High schools need to be able to expect that students entering the ninth grade will be ready to learn at the high school level. Applying full accountability to high schools for achievement and graduation must be coupled with efforts to improve students' readiness for the ninth grade. Partnering with middle schools, high schools must set standards of readiness for eighth graders and assess whether they are meeting these standards in order to identify at-risk students early. When students are behind, intensive academic help in reading and math must be provided before they begin the ninth grade. High schools and middle schools should be rewarded when they're successful in devising programs that help at-risk students find success in the ninth grade.

6

EVALUATE THE STATUS OF HIGH SCHOOL JUNIORS

As students prepare to enter the final year of high school, we must constantly evaluate their progress to ensure they can succeed on the next level once they graduate. For those students in danger of graduating without the appropriate skills, intervention strategies such as senior-year supplemental activities, coursework and tutorials should be used to ensure students will be prepared for college or a career. For those juniors who are behind but still plan to attend college, schools should provide additional reading, writing and mathematics training to ensure college readiness. For those students planning to enter the workforce after graduation, core academic work should be supplemented with career concentration and employer certification programs.

7

RESHAPE HIGH SCHOOL CAREER/TECHNICAL COURSES

These courses must be more closely aligned with current college and career readiness and professional standards for the fields of study offered. Assist teachers to prepare course syllabi, develop authentic problems and projects, and create a repository of these for all schools to share.

8

EXPLORE OPTIONS FOR EVALUATING READINESS BEYOND PASSING CURRENT STATE EXAMS

This could include passing a state board-approved, industry-specific certification exam. The state would set the criteria for approving these certification exams.³

³ See Southern Regional Education Board report of a recent study on employer certification exams and the criteria used for their review: *Employer/Certification Examinations: Alternative Graduation Examinations Beyond Reading, Writing and Mathematics*.

ONE STEP AT A TIME: A Phased Approach to High Value High Schools

High Value High Schools will be the result of a long-term commitment to improving education in Louisiana. The three-phased approach will immediately address the most basic areas of concern, creating a foundation that will allow for the success of more innovative, long-term strategies.

Short Term Strategies

1. Expand Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG)
2. Create the Career Readiness Certification and GED Program
3. Literacy strategies
4. Algebra application strategies
5. Eliminate truancy
6. Alternatives to out-of-school suspensions
7. Dropout early warning systems – DEWS
8. Work-study and paid internship programs
9. Develop an approach to International Benchmarking

Intermediate Strategies

1. Ninth-Grade Academies
2. Credit recovery
3. Grade recovery in high-failure courses

Long Term Strategies

1. Expansion of Model Schools
 - **New Technology High School** – A model that focuses on project-based learning, team teaching, interactive learning settings, technology-based teaching/learning/record keeping.
 - **High Schools that Work** – A whole school model that focuses on ten key practices that promote relevance, relationship and rigor as well as 21st Century Skills, literacy and numeracy across content areas, and project-based learning.
 - **Early College High School** – Dual enrollment that allows students to earn a high school diploma and college credit simultaneously.
 - **Project Lead the Way®** – The hands-on, project- and problem-based Project Lead The Way approach adds rigor to traditional technical programs and relevance to traditional academics.
2. Implementation of International Benchmarking

HIGH VALUE HIGH SCHOOLS ARE ALREADY IN MOTION: Dropout Prevention in Spring 2009

In Spring 2009, the Louisiana Department of Education, in partnership with business groups and other state organizations, will launch a pilot program for dropout prevention. Targeting 14 school districts (both rural and urban) scattered throughout the state, the program will focus on providing GED support and Work-Ready Certificates so that those who don't finish high school still have opportunities to succeed.

Taking notes from the Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) program, each district must offer the following components to their GED program:

- A Work-Ready Certificate
- A scripted curriculum aligned with Career Work Ready Certificate and pass the GED
- Content-relevant software designed to address the level of reading skills of the student
- Dual enrollment and/or nationally recognized industry-based certification training
- Pre-employability skills training (soft skills)
- Assurance that the student is drug free and will consent to drug testing
- A one-on-one mentor
- A paid work experience/internship (Recommended)

This pilot program is intended to determine the capacity of the system (PK-12, Higher Education, Workforce, Labor, Business and Industry) to effectively administer these strategies. A planned expansion to further school districts is planned for September 2009.