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Louisiana's Transition to Higher Standards

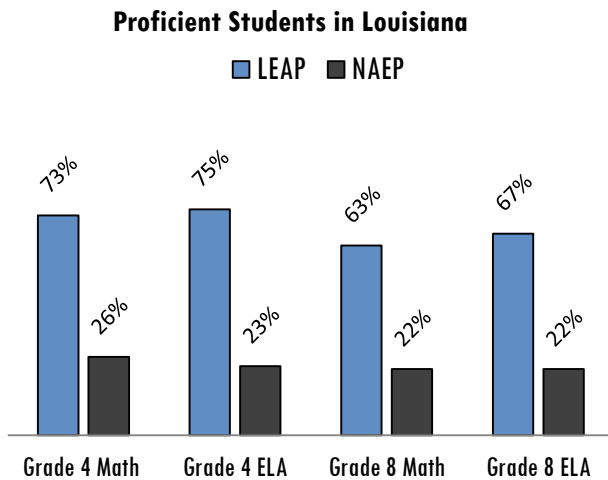
In 2010, along with 45 other states, Louisiana's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) adopted the Common Core State Standards, a set of academic content standards that define what a student should know and be able to do in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics in each grade. This set of K-12 standards updates the standards that Louisiana has had in place since the 1990s, which require regular revision. As with Louisiana's previous standards, the Common Core State Standards provide a framework within which local school districts in Louisiana are authorized to develop their own curricula to help students meet these goals.

The Case for Higher Standards

As a result of tough decisions by policymakers and hard work by school leaders and teachers, student achievement continues to rise on the state's standardized tests (LEAP/iLEAP). Graduation rates are increasing, more students are taking the ACT, and more students are qualifying for TOPS and going to college. Nonetheless, the gap persists between Louisiana's performance

and student achievement in other states and around the world. There is still much work to be done.

In 2010, only one in four Louisiana students scored “proficient” on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).^{i, ii} In contrast, according to Louisiana’s



2012 student results on the LEAP/iLEAP, Louisiana considers approximately 70% of 4th and 8th grade students at grade level.

The data are clear: **Louisiana’s definition of proficiency is much lower than other states.**

Expecting less of Louisiana’s students denies them the opportunity to compete for college and careers with students from other states and other countries—a significant disadvantage in our global, 21st century economy.

In addition to a lack of preparation for our students, low and inconsistent standards have other negative ramifications:

- **Remediation in two- and four-year colleges:** In Fall 2010, 34% of first-time college freshmen in Louisiana were required to enroll in remedial courses.ⁱⁱⁱ This wastes significant public resources at the higher education level to re-teach what students should already know.
- **Continuous revisions to state standards and assessments:** Louisiana has historically shouldered the responsibility of revising standards and developing assessments on its own. Though necessary, this is also an expensive endeavor—in time, human resources, and dollars.
- **Inconsistency and lack of substance in teacher preparation:** Because each state has a different set of academic standards and colleges of education have to prepare teacher

COMMON CORE AND MILITARY FAMILIES

Military families and others with careers that require regular transfers have long faced challenges in their children’s education due to inconsistent standards across states. When military parents move from one state to another, they often find that their children are significantly ahead of their peers in the new state—or significantly behind. The National Military Family Association supports state adoption of the Common Core State Standards because it will benefit military families moving across state lines by ensuring that even if the curriculum is different, students are being held to the same standards.

candidates to teach across states, the result is a curriculum that addresses *no* standards and that may not effectively prepare the next generation of teachers.

Our students and educational system continue to struggle despite the ever-increasing demand for a more educated workforce in Louisiana. Increasingly, businesses prize cognitive STEM skills (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). High-growth industries like biotech, internet technologies, and personal electronics require a robust STEM workforce—jobs of the 21st century. Louisiana’s workforce needs are among the most diverse in the country. That’s why industry leaders like Rex Tillerson, chairman and CEO of ExxonMobil, and Virginia Rometty, CEO of IBM, have endorsed the Common Core.^{iv}

Louisiana’s adoption of the Common Core State Standards ensures that students in Louisiana will be held to a bar that truly prepares them for the college or career of their choosing. The standards will also make sure that Louisiana students are ready to compete locally, nationally, and internationally.

Louisiana’s Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards are a set of Kindergarten through 12th grade academic content standards in English Language Arts and mathematics that provide a framework for what students should know and be able to do in each grade. Compared to Louisiana’s former standards, Louisiana’s Common Core State Standards require more critical thinking and in-depth content knowledge. In English Language Arts, the standards encourage reading more informational texts and literature, and they require students to be able to analyze and compare texts. In mathematics, the standards focus on a narrower range of topics in each grade level, allowing teachers and students the opportunity to work deeply on both procedural fluency and conceptual understanding.

Examples of the actual Common Core standards include:

- Describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text (1st grade, English Language Arts)
- Multiply one-digit whole numbers by multiples of 10 in the range of 10-90 (e.g., 9x80, 5x60) using strategies based on place value and properties of operations (3rd grade, mathematics)
- Analyze how a drama’s or poem’s form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning (7th grade, English Language Arts)
- Create equations in two or more variables to represent relationships between quantities; graph equations on coordinate axes with labels and scales (algebra)

Louisiana's Common Core State Standards were born of a collaborative, research-driven effort under the leadership of state superintendents of education and governors from 48 states. Many educators, college faculty, and experts from Louisiana joined colleagues from other states to create and revise the standards to align with the needs of the students, teachers, and the community.^v Nearly 10,000 comments were received from the public during the process, including many positive remarks from educators, which were incorporated into the final standards.^{vi} Among educators and others, approval for the Common Core State Standards continues to be high. **A poll of more than 20,000 teachers indicates that nearly 80% of teachers believe that the Common Core State Standards will improve students' ability to think critically and to use reasoning skills.**^{vii}

The Common Core State Standards are rooted in data and research in the fields of mathematics, mathematics education, reading, English Language Arts education, and child development. National and Louisiana experts also incorporated feedback from industry and higher education on the important skills necessary for students to be successful in the workforce. When Louisiana's BESE adopted the standards, members expressed a belief that the clarity of the standards would help parents, educators, and the public understand the expectations for students while also promoting stronger teacher training, professional development, and collaboration.^{viii}

Louisiana's Implementation of the Common Core

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) began its investigation into the Common Core in 2009, and the state began transitioning to new, higher standards in Fall 2010, soon after BESE's adoption of the standards in Summer 2010.

- **2009–2010:** The LDE established work teams and educator review committees to provide feedback on the first draft of the Common Core State Standards, which the state submitted in February 2010.
- **2010–2011:** The LDE shared its transition plan with the public and developed support documents for the transition, including training videos and transitional curriculum.
- **2011–2012:** The LDE released its transition curriculum in math and English Language Arts in order to help teachers begin a gradual transition to the Common Core.

COMMON CORE IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Louisiana's Catholic schools have independently and voluntarily adopted the Common Core State Standards as a set of minimal learning targets, following the recommendations of the National Catholic Education Association.

- **2012–2013:** Kindergarten and 1st grade students were taught the Common Core State Standards in math and English Language Arts. Students in grades 2 through 12 were taught transitional standards. Test questions aligned to the Common Core were field tested in the 2013 LEAP and iLEAP. These field-tested items were not included in student scores.
- **2013–2014:** All K-12 students in English Language Arts and math are taught with the Common Core State Standards. The 2014 iLEAP and LEAP tests have been adjusted to align with the Common Core.
- **2014–2015:** All K-12 students in English Language Arts and math are again taught the Common Core State Standards. Assessments for 3rd through 8th grades will no longer be the LEAP and iLEAP but a new exam developed by Louisiana along with a national consortium of states known as the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC). High school students will take the ACT, which is aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Decisions about other high school assessments—the End-of-Course exams or PARCC—are pending.

The Common Core should allow local school districts and schools more autonomy in the development of their curriculum. For that reason, the state eliminated its Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum, a recommended prescribed curriculum that had been developed for Louisiana’s former standards. Instead, with Louisiana’s Common Core State Standards, each district is authorized to determine its own implementation plan for the Common Core within guidelines and with support from the state. For example, Ascension Parish paid their teachers to develop curricula aligned to Common Core in the summer of 2013, St. Tammany Parish is revising its online curricula for teachers to use, and Plaquemines Parish is providing experts and speakers for professional development while allowing teachers to develop their own curricula suited to their particular students.^{ix}

In order for schools and school districts to capitalize on their autonomy, however, they may need additional support. To support school districts, leaders, and teachers in implementing the new higher standards, Louisiana has undertaken a series of activities:

- **Louisiana Teacher Leaders:** The state has recruited and trained more than 2,000 teachers to serve as leaders on the Common Core State Standards in their schools—at least one teacher from every school in Louisiana and a district administrative team. These leaders were trained on the actual standards as well

as how to train and support fellow teachers in their transition to the Common Core. The state plans to expand the number of teacher leaders to 4,000 by the end of 2014.

- **School District Trainings:** Many school districts have offered opportunities for professional development, and thousands of additional teachers have received local training. Some school districts offered stipends for local teachers to help develop their own district-specific curricula aligned with the Common Core State Standards.
- **Educator Leader Cadre:** Louisiana's Educator Leader Cadre, led by Louisiana and PARCC, has participated in the sampling and review of the items on the new assessment and has served as trainers in Common Core.
- **Louisiana Believes Teacher Toolbox:** The state is providing sample year-long plans, unit plans, tools for daily lesson planning, and videos for lessons that align to the Common Core. A variety of professional development support formats are included in the Teacher Toolbox, from webinars to student learning target workshops to exemplar tools.^x

Common Core Assessments (PARCC)

Louisiana joined the PARCC consortium to ensure that our students can meet the new higher standards and compete with their peers across the country. PARCC is creating 21st century assessments for grades 3 through 12, which will offer several advantages over the current LEAP/iLEAP exams, including:

- **Higher Quality and More Rigor:** The PARCC assessment will be more rigorous than Louisiana's current testing regimen. Two independent studies have verified the superiority of PARCC's assessment design and item quality compared to previous state assessments.^{xi}
- **Wider Range of Question Types:** The PARCC assessment will include two

HOW COMMON CORE AFFECTS GIFTED STUDENTS AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

As with Louisiana's past standards, teachers and local school districts are allowed to adapt their instruction to serve the needs of their individual students. Students with disabilities will continue to have Individualized Education Plans that include instructional and test modifications with the implementation of Common Core. In addition, teachers will have the option to leap ahead in the standards if their gifted students have already mastered grade-level standards.

summative assessments, a performance-based assessment delivered after completing 75% of the school year, and an end-of-year assessment administered after completing 90% of the school year. These four exams move beyond the simple multiple choice questions in Louisiana's current assessment system. The performance-based assessment, for example, requires students to write essays, to explain their thinking, and to show their work in mathematics.

- **Technology Based:** The PARCC is an online assessment that allows for higher-quality questions that require greater critical thinking skills. For example, students will be able to create graphs and write essays using the computer, something that has previously been more difficult to do in paper-and-pencil assessments. Approximately 50% of school districts and 80% of schools meet the minimum standard for technology readiness for PARCC.^{xii}
- **No Additional Cost:** Louisiana's annual administration of PARCC will cost roughly the same as the state's LEAP/iLEAP system, even as the state is able to implement a higher quality test.^{xiii}

More difficult assessments mean that Louisiana is likely to experience a dip in its student achievement scores for the year or two following the implementation of PARCC. BESE is expected to debate and adopt adjustments to existing accountability policies to accommodate the expected score changes at its December 2013 meeting. This includes adjustments to School Performance Scores, the teacher evaluation system, and high stakes testing policies for students.

Louisiana's new standards and assessments do not require data collection beyond current data collection, which includes aggregated student assessment scores and demographic and school information. This information is not available at the individual student level. In fact, PARCC's governing board, of which Louisiana is a member, will soon release a student data privacy policy.^{xiv}

Bottom Line

Louisiana's transition to higher standards promises a stronger foundation for our state. Although students and teachers continue to improve performance and outcomes, it's time to set an honest expectation for our leaders of tomorrow—a bar that truly prepares our students for colleges and industries of the future.

References

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- ^v <http://regents.louisiana.gov/louisiana-residents-involved-in-ccss-activities/>
- ^{vi} Reaction of National Governor's Association and Council of Chief State School Officers to the March 2010 Draft Common Core State Standards: Highlights and Themes from the Public Feedback, <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/k-12-feedback-summary.pdf>.
- ^{vii} "Teachers praise new standards for classroom learning." USA Today. October 4, 2013.
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- ^{xii} "Number of Technology-Ready School Districts Increases Sevenfold in One Year," *Louisiana Department of Education*, August 22, 2013.
- ^{xiii} There are costs associated with upgrading technology for the implementation of PARCC in 2015. However, districts vary in the quality of their technology. Some districts are already prepared for PARCC, and thus their technology costs will be minimal. Other districts will require a significant one-time investment in technology upgrades.
- ^{xiv} "PARCC Governing Board Meets, Appoints PARCC Chief Executive Officer," PARCC, September 26, 2013.