



## CABL Education Priorities in Response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis has dashed Louisiana's economy, crippled many businesses, and disrupted the lives of every citizen of our state. It has also had a significant impact on all aspects of education. There are many things education and school leaders are doing to address the issues facing our students in this unprecedented time. CABL has outlined its priorities in early education, K-12 education, and postsecondary education.

### Early Education

**Child care and early education are critical not just to the formation and development of our kids, but also to the reopening of the economy and getting people back to work. Much of our workforce is diminished if quality child care options are not available to working families. To that end, CABL has developed these priorities in early education:**

1. As the impacts of COVID-19 linger, we must ensure that child care centers are able to operate at a capacity that supports Phase I reopening of the economy now that that has begun. These centers are critical to the reopening of businesses as workers will need quality settings for their children as they return to work. **To ensure the child care sector is able to accommodate this need, the state should offer ongoing guidance to provide for the safety of child care staff and children, necessary PPE for all, and modified instruction options for early education teachers.**
2. **Louisiana should continue to provide subsidies to assist low-income workers in placing their children in high-quality child care settings.** In response to the COVID crisis, child care centers that remained open were required to enact a number of policies and procedures to protect children and staff. This increased the cost of providing the service and the state responded with additional funding through the CARES Act to subsidize children of essential workers to enroll in child care. Through the recovery period, these subsidies should be continued with consideration given to expanding them to include those looking for work.
3. The child care sector is a critical component in the business recovery of the state and as such will require appropriate access to financial and technical support to meet the needs of a re-opening economy. Public schools and public pre-k programs have access to public funding which has helped keep them whole through the current crisis. To date that has not been cut. Child care for young children is primarily a private-sector initiative and as such has been severely impacted by the severe job losses across the economy. At the same time, it provides a service that is vital to the state's economic recovery as working parents return to their jobs. **Continued investment in early education and other public and private financial support is needed to ensure the return of the state's workforce.**

## K-12 Education

We have seen disruptions in public education before as a result of hurricanes and severe floods, but never have we experienced school closures on a statewide scale with literally every student, teacher, and family impacted. Students have lost the equivalent of half-a-semester of in-person instruction heading into a summer break where we know an additional loss of learning occurs. Ensuring that our students get the help they need to get back on track will require extraordinary planning, strong implementation, and persistent oversight. To that end, CABL has developed these priorities in K-12 education:

1. In the short-term, **every district should have a continuing learning plan in place** that includes daily outreach and communication with students and continued delivery of nutritious meals to students in need.
2. **Each district should have a plan in place to ensure the health and safety of returning students, educators, and school staff.** This should include appropriate sanitizing protocols, distancing requirements, PPEs, and social and emotional support where needed.
3. **Districts should have a technology plan** to allow them to quickly access federal dollars to support broadband access, online and distance learning, and meeting the state goal of having a 1:1 ratio of laptops or tablets for students. The plan should include appropriate training for teachers in online and distance learning best practices. Where access to broadband services is not readily available, schools should turn to other resources to assist in learning such as instructional programs, teacher training in online instruction, and technology assistance from Louisiana Public Broadcasting.
4. There is no question that despite home schooling and other efforts, students have lost ground through school closures and that will likely increase over the summer. **Every district should have a plan to mitigate the learning loss** that has occurred, including individual learning plans for students, and these should be communicated to parents and the public. Mitigation plans could include summer schools, early start of school, abbreviated breaks, extended days during the school year, or other means to help provide remediation to students of greatest need.
5. **Districts should have a plan in place to assess students as early as possible to see where they stand** and publicly communicate the results so parents, citizens, and stakeholders understand the challenges and needs of schools in moving students back to their expected levels of learning.
6. **School leaders should be transparent.** All districts should be required to report how many students they are touching on a daily basis, how many devices are in their hands to facilitate learning, and what they are doing to identify students who are behind and need to catch up. Later we need to understand just how much loss of learning has occurred, what programs and offerings are in place to help move students up, and lessons learned from their initial response to school closures in the spring. Our accountability system may be on hold for now, but accountability itself cannot be.

7. **Schools and districts need contingency plans in place in the event of another outbreak.** The fact that the corona virus struck hard during the spring does not mean it will not return in the fall or winter. Schools need to build on their experience and ensure that they have the tools, trained staffing, and overall flexibility to pivot quickly in the event that classrooms are once again required to close.

## Postsecondary Education

**Our colleges and universities were, perhaps, in the best position to pivot to online learning after campuses across the state were shuttered, but many issues remain. The digital divide that is most apparent in K-12 education, also exists to some degree in higher education. And the dramatic loss of jobs has only underscored the need for Louisiana to significantly raise its education attainment levels and strategically target investment in short-term worker training and re-training. To that end, CABL has developed these priorities in postsecondary education:**

1. Each postsecondary institution in the state should have **plans and protocols in place to ensure the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff** when they are able to return for in-person classes.
2. Given the scope of the digital divide the corona virus has exposed in Louisiana, **a significant amount of funding from the federal stimulus should be targeted to investments in technology.** This would include broadband connectivity and devices for both K-12 and higher education, but also strong professional development to instructors in best practices for online learning. Much of higher education has experience in distance learning, but that varies by institution, instructor, and class. It is now necessary that almost every class that had traditionally been unavailable online now have a distance learning component or options for minimal student/faculty contact.
3. At a time when approximately 350,000 workers remain unemployed and many of them are considering upgrading their skills to move into a new industry, **Louisiana must provide the quick-turnaround workforce training they need to go back to work.** It is imperative that federal stimulus dollars and other state resources such as Rapid Response funds, be targeted into a highly-focused workforce development initiative. This training should be aligned to regional workforce needs and should also consider new-demand jobs, particularly in the health care field, that are a direct result of the corona crisis.
4. **The momentum that was building for the expansion of dual enrollment opportunities for all high school students must not be sidelined by the current situation.** Dual enrollment is an important educational strategy for Louisiana. It helps students in high school by exposing them to college-level instruction or skills training leading to a postsecondary credential, while making college more affordable and shortening the time to earn a credential. Participation must continue to grow.
5. During this confusing time, it is important that **counselors work to ensure that graduating high school seniors have completed the FAFSA, the federal form needed to qualify for college financial aid** including everything from TOPS to PELL grants. The graduation process this year has been disrupted enough without seniors experiencing barriers to college because of unfinished paper work.

6. Louisiana's Master Plan for postsecondary education placed a sharp focus on increasing the education attainment levels of our citizens. The COVID crisis shows how critical it is to maintain that focus and use the federal stimulus dollars targeted for higher education to creatively build upon that. Studies show that those most impacted by the shutdown of the nation's economy are low-skilled workers employed in low-paying jobs. Not only are they among the first to join the jobless ranks, the fact that they often live on the financial edge has repercussions across the economy. If we were a more highly-educated state, with a more diverse economy, the economic impact of this health crisis on Louisiana would be much different. **The state as a whole should maintain a strong focus on the Master Plan attainment goals during this time.**
  
7. The COVID crisis reminds us that our university-based research and training programs are a strategic asset in critical times. Our in-state medical schools produce the vast majority of our in-state doctors and pharmacists. Our universities are engaged in vaccine testing and the production of a variety of PPE through their use of 3-D printing. And our research institutions, like the Pennington Biomedical Research Center, are studying some of the chronic diseases that have proven to be the underlying causes of the high number of COVID-19 deaths in Louisiana. **As budget cuts are contemplated, these assets, and the role they play in the health and safety of our citizens, should not be neglected.**

While Louisiana has much to do to get its economy up and running in the short-term, we must remember that the education issues we face today because of COVID-19 can have a long-term impact on our future, the strength of our workforce, and the prosperity of our people and our state.

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