



LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

*Testimony to be provided to the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship
"How Innovative Education Systems Can Better Prepare Students to Enter the Workforce"*

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OVERVIEW

I would like to thank Senator Vitter for the opportunity to speak today regarding the Louisiana Department of Education's innovative work to better prepare all Louisiana students for college and careers, including those who have typically struggled, to prepare them to meet Louisiana's workforce needs, to the partnerships we have built with higher education and local business and industry to make this possible.

The greatest factor in both the growth of our state's economy and the ability of our high school graduates to become productive citizens will be the skills with which young people are equipped. While most jobs do not require a four-year college degree, high-growth high-wage jobs in Louisiana almost always require education after high school. A high school's most important role is to help students attain the knowledge and capabilities that make possible adult opportunities.

Today, Louisiana students complete either a TOPS University or Jump Start TOPS Tech graduation pathway, both of which provide rewards for schools, align with our state TOPS and TOPS Tech scholarship programs, and validate students on national benchmarks. The two diploma pathways ensure ninth and tenth grade students focus on mastering a set of foundational academic skills in core subjects. This provides students with the opportunity to explore and discover their true interests, rather than forcing them to commit to a single graduation path too early in high school. During the eleventh and twelfth grades, students will



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develop basic and advanced college and workplace skills that will prepare them for college and career success, and ensure they are competitive in any workplace or academic environment.

WORKFORCE NEEDS AND BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Jump Start is Louisiana's new program to provide career courses and workplace experiences to high school students.

Regional Jump Start Teams, comprised of school districts, higher education, the State Economic Development and Workforce Commission, and business and industry, are formed to identify appropriate career and credentialing opportunities for high school students. These Regional Jump Start teams develop and/or adopt pathways that outline career courses, workplace experiences, and industry-based credentials in career fields most likely to lead to high-wage jobs. The pathways developed and/or adopted by each Regional Jump Start Team are specific to the workforce needs in that region of the state. Examples of Jump Start pathways this region will be offering include the following:

- **Health Sciences Patient Care and Management**, which can lead to an Industry-Based credential in Certified Nurse Aid, Emergency Medical Responder, or Emergency Medical Technician basic, for example.
- **Hospitality, Tourism, Culinary and Retail**, which can lead to an Industry-Based Credential in Certified Hospitality and Tourism Management Level II, Customer Service or ServSafe, for example.
- **Agriculture Tech**, which can lead to an Industry-Based credential in NCEER Level 1 or 2 in Carpentry, Electrical, or Welding, for example.

Louisiana's Course Choice Program (referred to as Course Access in other parts of the country) enables Louisiana families and students to select from hundreds of online and face-to-face courses not traditionally offered by high schools and middle schools. Course Access makes sure



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that all students have access to the courses they need to succeed in college and career pathways.

Through Course Access, students can gain access to dual-enrollment courses offered at the state's four-year universities and career courses through private training providers and the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) campuses. Students now have access to foreign language courses, career and technical education courses culminating in industry-valued certification, Advanced Placement and TOPS aligned college courses, ACT prep courses to increase chances of qualifying for a state scholarship, and math courses using Khan Academy. All of these can be difficult to staff and offer in rural areas, but are now available to all students in all public schools around our state.

STRUGGLING OR NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Jump Start regional teams, the Department of Education, Louisiana Economic Development and the Louisiana Workforce Commission continue in their work to create a variety of graduation pathways, each with industry-valued credentials attainable by all Louisiana high school students on their way to on-time graduation. This includes specific pathways developed for and accessible to students who have typically struggled or been academically behind, as well as certain students with disabilities when determined appropriate by their IEP teams. In order to extend these same opportunities for these students, the Jump Start programs have been scaffolded to identify multiple credentials that students may pursue based on their interests and abilities. For example, some students may be interested in and able to complete the series of courses and trainings needed to be a welder and achieve an NCCER industry credential. Other students may not be able to complete the welder curriculum, but can achieve a welder's helper credential. Both provide economic opportunity for students and are aligned to our state's workforce needs.



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SPURRING INNOVATION

No other state's education department has partnered so closely with school districts, higher education, state agencies, and business and industry to identify appropriate career and credentialing opportunities for high school students. Jump Start Regional Teams develop and submit proposed graduation pathways to a multi-agency Review Panel, which consists of members from Louisiana Department of Economic Development (LED), Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) and Louisiana Department of Education (LDE). This Panel collaborates with the regional teams to ensure that course offerings in a pathway are relevant, that credentials are relevant and rigorous, and that sample schedules provide appropriate guidance to school counselors and educators. The decision to approve proposed Jump Start pathways is driven not by state or local education bureaucrats, but by business and industry, which certifies that the pathway is indeed responsive to the needs of our state's employers and economy. They provide a critical "reality check" in telling us whether the proposed pathways will really lead to economic opportunity for our students. If the proposal does not meet the mark, they provide valuable feedback on how to adjust the proposal to make it meaningful and relevant.

CLOSING REMARKS

I hope the innovative partnerships I have described show just how much is possible when we begin with the end in mind, when we prioritize the needs of our students and our state, and when we admit that we as educators cannot do it alone. Everything we do should be aimed at maximizing the economic opportunity of our next generation of citizens and providing them with a pathway to prosperity. In doing so we will build a stronger, more vibrant state in which to live. Thank you for the opportunity to share this exciting work with you today.