

Northwest Louisiana Regional Jump Start Partnership

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Jump Start Process Steps

Regional Collaboration at a Deep, Personal Level

Northwest Louisiana benefits from a group of stakeholders who have worked together effectively for years. “Way up” in the Northwest we’ve learned to be independent and self-sufficient. We don’t wait for programs or policies to tell us what to do next. We identify the steps we need to take, and pick up the phone to call a friend and colleague with whom we’ve worked before.

There are important benefits to the effective personal relationships we’ve developed across our region:

- we have a clear concept of what each other does and who needs to participate on any specific issue;
- we have the ability to coalesce quickly to address an opportunity; and
- there is no internal competition (like who will be the lead in a grant proposal) to restrict our progress.

As we increase the scope of our regional cooperation geographically – bringing in stakeholders and school districts from parishes across the region – we are confident that our foundation of effective regional collaboration is a major plus in taking full advantage of the Jump Start initiative.

Employer-driven Initiatives Funded Using an Entrepreneurial Approach

Our educators – both K-12 and post-secondary – realize that our initiatives have to be employer-driven in order to be effective for our students.

School prepares students to succeed in life. Our economy in Northwest Louisiana is held back because too few of our students graduate from high school with the technical, academic and employability skills they need to become successful, productive adults. *Employment transforms students into successful, productive adults.*

Our educators (and all of our region’s stakeholders) understand clearly that our goal is to develop programs that deliver students to the workplace with the skills that inspire area employers to hire them. We have a track record of creating effective CTE programs that capture the interest and imagination of our students while preparing them for careers. We can and must expand this track record into new skill areas and new geographies in our region.

Fortunately, our team of collaborative stakeholders has experience in taking an entrepreneurial approach to finding new program funding and in aligning existing funding streams to support our efforts. We collaborate to develop successful grant proposals, and identify opportunities for local businesses and groups to fund initiatives that will help our students and our region. We are very confident that we can leverage our creative approach to program funding to help drive Jump Start forward in our region.

Innovative grants currently in development in our region include an initiative to implement a youth- and family-oriented communications campaign that more favorably portrays high-growth job sectors with old stereotypes and problematic images. By sharing “success stories” through websites, social media, etc., we will increase awareness of career opportunities with parents, students, educators and the community. A good example in this regard is in the manufacturing sector, where jobs are vastly different in current practice than the mental picture most families have of “dirty manufacturing plants.”

Our vision is to create an effective communications effort to increase awareness of high-wage careers in the technical and career employment sectors among parents, students, educators and community members

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throughout our region. We have to overcome the widely-held perception that “all high-achieving students must go to four-year colleges,” and create instead a more balanced understanding that there are multiple pathways – career and academic – that can make our students successful adults.

Determination Combined with an *Ask / Learn / Share* Approach

We don't get discouraged in Northwest Louisiana. We are a determined group with the dedication to achieve our goal of increasing per capita income in our region. We understand that successfully increasing per capita income will increase economic and workforce opportunities – and ultimately the quality of life – for all our citizens.

We have a track record of “poking our nose” into new areas to figure out what we need to know in order to succeed. We have developed – by trial, error and now habit – the process of:

- *Ask* – if we don't know something we're not shy . . . we ask;
- *Learn* – when we get the answers we need we move forward; and
- *Share* – we document for our colleagues what we've learned so they can apply that lesson learned in their future endeavors.

We have learned that “*We can't do that*” isn't a final answer. It's simply a challenge we can address by asking . . . learning . . . and sharing the best practices our region's educators can use to help our students.

Enhanced Collaboration and Cross-Boundary Sharing

This part of our process is perhaps, candidly, more aspiration than track record.

Like every other school district in Louisiana, our region's school districts struggle with budget challenges and rapidly changing policies and requirements from the Department of Education.

That being said, we understand how greater collaboration among school districts, employers, community stakeholders and post-secondary institutions benefit our region's workforce and economic development efforts. If we do a better job of leveraging our region's resources and best CTE practices, our employers will benefit as we deliver better-educated and better-prepared cohorts of high school graduates. Our high school graduates will be positioned to take full advantage of post-secondary academic opportunities and employment.

We have the opportunity to work together to implement proven, effective initiatives that every district in the region can replicate and/or share. Where facilities are expensive to create (or where qualified instruction is in short supply) we need to identify ways our region's students can best share programs across parish boundaries. (Once Caddo Career & Technology Center's Course Choice Program emerges from its pilot stage, it may become a strong vehicle for sharing high-quality, high-cost CTE programs with other districts across the region.) We also believe there may be the opportunity to expand dual enrollment.

As we consider the challenges and opportunities of using best practices across our region:

- it may make sense given logistical and funding constraints to pilot some best practices initiatives in at least one urban area and one rural area;
- it will probably make sense to embed employability “soft skills” in the curricula of the CTE course offerings we offer across parish boundaries; and

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- it is clear that our school districts will enthusiastically invest in these best practices initiatives when there are appropriate accountability weights given to positive student career outcomes as measured by data currently collected by each stakeholder.

Jump Start Process Steps

Identify and Launch CTE Initiatives in Major Employability Areas

We have a strong base of high school-based CTE courses in Caddo and the surrounding parishes, and strong CTE offerings in our community and technical colleges.

From this strong base, we are going to launch an analytical process to expand our portfolio of effective CTE courses. These courses will be based on the perspectives and needs of regional employers, maintaining a broad portfolio of CTE programs that support our region's varied employment needs. Our Vision: *“there is dignity in all employment, and there needs to be a job for every student.”*

We have identified the areas of “major employability” in Northwest Louisiana:

- a) the four high-growth job sectors identified by the Department of Education through its Parthenon study – **Construction, Manufacturing, Transportation and Healthcare;**
- b) plus two additional high growth job sectors identified through our own regional information and analyses – **Energy and Information Technologies.**

For each of these employment sectors, we are going to implement annual process for developing the types of course offerings and student / faculty worksite experiences that will help students develop appropriate job skills:

Step 1: Gap Analysis – we will analyze the existing CTE programs available throughout our region with the skills and behaviors that our region's employers want young employees to have. (The North Louisiana Economic Partnership is near completion of a comprehensive workforce / labor market study.)

Step 2: Develop New Offerings – we will create and/or expand course offerings to address identified gaps in targeted job sectors. We will partner with business allies to build “worksite experiences” for students into each pathway (e.g., 1-day, 1-week and 2-week job shadowing programs, as well as 1-month and longer internships) as well as similar externships and worksite experiences for faculty and counselors. Over the years, we have provided a variety of student job shadow, student internship and faculty/counselor externships as funding has been available – we will incorporate these into preparation for each job sector. We also want to explore getting state approval for students to earn academic credit in CTE classes that have intensive academic requirements (there are many other states that do this). Many students learn academic skills at a higher level when those skills are embedded in relevant, rigorous courses that provide for practice and meaningful application.

Step 3: Find the Funding – we will work together to secure the funding we need to develop targeted CTE programs, create required facilities and hire qualified instructors. *Where the most cost-effective solution for the region is sharing programs and resources, we'll work together to address logistical or school funding barriers that threaten to prevent regional student access to high-impact CTE programs.*

Step 4: Graduate Qualified New Hires – we succeed when our students graduate from high school with skills that inspire local employers to hire them. *Our hope is that future Department of Education accountability systems: a) reward our schools for the students we place in entry-level jobs in targeted industry segments; b) reward schools when students enter targeted post-secondary programs, including industry apprenticeship programs (instead of rewarding students who enter post-secondary programs*

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without a focused program of study); and, c) recognize these pathways as viable, equally rigorous ways of achieving our Vision.

To implement this type of renewable process every year, we intend to leverage our region's *Step Forward* regional accountability process.

Regional Accountability

Our region is in the early stages of launching *Step Forward*, a process of integrated goals that stretch from early childhood to young adulthood led by the Community Foundation of North Louisiana. *Step Forward* goals are indicated in the diagram below:

Stakeholders from across our region are working together to implement the *Step Forward* process and achieve these goals.

The annual *Step Forward* goals we develop emerge organically from the existing accountability systems that each of our stakeholders use. If we can integrate existing stakeholder goals into a regional set of annual goals, we will have a way to seamlessly track our progress while individual stakeholders seek to achieve their internal organizational goals.

We can also use these integrated *Step Forward* goals as the basis for stakeholder communications about our regional efforts to enhance the job readiness and job performance of high school graduates. **Next Steps**

Barriers

It is likely that our region will identify the same barriers that other regions across Louisiana have identified during their Jump Start efforts:

- rewarding school systems appropriately for both career and academic student achievement through the school accountability system;
- overcoming logistical / geographic barriers to sharing key programs / facilities;
- fostering greater collaboration among school districts, post-secondary institutions, employers, government entities and community-based organizations in each employment sector;
- identifying funding streams to support expansion of career-technical course offerings;
- altering perceptions of high-demand, high-wage employment sectors; and,
- increasing the academic preparation of students for success in these critical pathways.

Our confident belief is that our region, other regions and the Department of Education can work out whatever policies we collectively need to achieve our common vision of better life outcomes for Louisiana students (and, in our region, higher per capita income).

Moving Forward *Fast!*

Our intent is to move forward *fast*, with the expectation that we will learn and continuously improve our efforts as we move forward.

To create a definitive timetable for next steps, we need the answers to a few key questions:

- What is the Department of Education's intended implementation timetable?

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- Can individual school systems move forward faster as “test districts,” with waivers or other supportive efforts by BESE and the Department of Education?
- Are there innovations pending – for example, new content from Course Choice – that will enable us to expand our CTE offerings in the short-term?

Because we are confident that reasonable people working together can overcome any of the barriers we might face, our focus will be on how we can leverage the Jump Start initiative to move forward *fast* – a region-wide, inclusive effort that accommodates different implementation timetables for different school districts, including those prepared to move forward immediately as “test districts.”

We will move *fast* because we are committed to a philosophy that concentrates on getting initiatives off the ground and underway as we continuously work to improve the focus and results. We will create short-term objectives and early “wins” to guide our initial efforts in pilot districts / programs, with longer-term objectives to transform our regional efforts and measurably increase our region’s per capita income.

Our objectives will be both practical and aspirational – stepping stones that meet people where they are and move them toward greater employment opportunities and more satisfying lives.