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# Consideration of a report from the Financial Aid Working Group

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# Current State of Financial Aid Completion In Louisiana

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During the 2014-2015 school year, the FAFSA completion rate nationwide was approximately 55 percent. Louisiana's public school completion rate was 48 percent.

- ▶ Louisiana students forego tens of millions each year in federal grants, state opportunities, and other funding for postsecondary education.
  - ▶ In Louisiana, it is the students most in need financially who are not completing financial aid forms.
  - ▶ Among students who qualify for a TOPS award, lower scoring students apply for the award at a much lower rate.
    - Approximately 91 percent of students eligible for TOPS Opportunity awards seek awards.
    - Only **21 percent** of students eligible for TOPS Tech awards apply for awards.
- ▶ Forty-seven percent of 2015 graduates did not meet the requirements for TOPS Opportunity, Performance, Honors, or Tech awards. These students are thus highly unlikely to receive state aid for college or technical training programs.
  - ▶ However, more than 11,000 of these students (56 percent) did not complete a FAFSA, making them ineligible to receive federal aid as well.

# Increasing Financial Aid Access in Louisiana

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- ▶ In December 2015, the Board approved a revision to Bulletin 741, *Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators*, which requires that public school students graduating spring 2018 and beyond have taken one of the following steps as part of their Individual Graduation Plan:
  - ▶ Complete the FAFSA
  - ▶ Complete the Louisiana TOPS form
  - ▶ Submit a parent's signature on a non-participation form
  - ▶ Receive a waiver through district hardship waiver process
- ▶ In January 2016, the Department formed the Financial Aid Working Group to ensure that parents, students and districts are properly supported throughout the implementation of policy

# Financial Aid Working Group – Purpose and Members

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**Purpose:** To assist the Louisiana Department of Education with the implementation of the financial aid access policy approved by the Board in December 2015 by:

1. Developing a state action plan for school level financial aid form completion;
2. Assisting the Department in the ongoing identification of support services and programs available for secondary schools and families; and
3. Assisting in the development of partnerships with financial aid-related support programs, services, and other stakeholders

## **Members:**

- ▶ Over 40 participants from across the state representing local education agencies, higher education, non-profits, government agencies, financial aid service providers, and others

# Financial Aid Working Group – Purpose and Members

Organization/Affiliation	Member
Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO)	Stacy Martin
Career Compass of Louisiana	Kacy Edwards
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge	David Aguillard
Certified Public Accountant	Mr. Layne McDaniel
Charter School representative	Melissa Carollo
College Bridge New Orleans	Paris Woods
Jefferson Davis Parish Schools	Brian Lejeune
Jobs for America's Graduates- Louisiana (JAG-LA)	Alisha Ferrington
Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (LAICU)	Emily London-Jones
Louisiana Association of Principals	Robert Schlicher
Louisiana Association of Special Education Administrators (LASEA)	Cheramie Kerth
Louisiana Association of Special Education Administrators (LASEA)	Marsha Medine
Louisiana Board of Regents	LeAnn Detillier
Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS)	Jenifer Finney
Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)	James Vidacovich
Louisiana Department of Revenue (LDR)	Kevin Richard
Louisiana National Guard Youth Challenge	MSG Richard Bullock
Louisiana Nonpublic School Council (NPSC)	Sr. Carol Shively
Louisiana Education Loan Authority	Ann Carmichael
Louisiana Education Loan Authority	Tricia Dubroc
Louisiana Education Loan Authority	Joni Leggio
Louisiana Education Loan Authority	Christie Smith

# Financial Aid Working Group – Purpose and Members

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Organization/Affiliation	Member
Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ)	Kim Mims
Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA)	Dr. Tireka Cobb
Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA)	Gus Wales
Louisiana School Counselor Association (LSCA)	Tara Washington
Louisiana School Boards Association (LSBA)	Scott Richard
Louisiana State University System	Amy Marix
Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC)	Bryan Moore
Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC)	Cathy Wells
Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC)	Lori Cherry
Our Lady of the Lake College	Barrye Bailey
Southern University System	Miracle Davis
St. John the Baptist Parish Public Schools	Kevin George
Tulane University Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives	Amanda Kruger-Hill
United Way	Edy Addison
United Way	Denise Durel
University of Louisiana System	Dr. Edwin H. Litolff
Urban League of Greater New Orleans	Rashida H. Govan, Ph.D
VAYLA New Orleans	Thu Nguyen
Welsh High School	Mamcy Mallett
YMCA	Jeff Casey

# Financial Aid Working Group – Purpose and Members

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## **Tuesday, March 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting**

- ▶ Identify objectives of the working group
- ▶ Review different types of state and federal financial aid available for postsecondary education
- ▶ Review financial aid application completion statistics in Louisiana

## **Thursday, April 21<sup>st</sup> Meeting**

- ▶ Evaluate financial aid support services and programs currently available for schools and families
- ▶ Determine most effective means of informing schools and families of available support services and programs
- ▶ Identify grant funding opportunities for districts, schools, and financial aid intermediaries
- ▶ Review the Department's current partnerships and alliances with financial aid related support programs and services
- ▶ Identify potential partnerships and alliances with financial aid support programs and services

## **Thursday, June 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting**

- ▶ Review final recommendations of the Financial Aid Working Group

# Financial Aid Working Group – Key Findings

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- ▶ The extent to which Louisiana’s students achieve post-secondary education and training is critically tied to the state’s economic well-being and quality of life;
- ▶ Louisiana students forego millions of dollars each year in federal grants, state opportunities, and other funding for postsecondary education;
- ▶ Financial aid completion rates can increase if families and schools receive comprehensive information and specific tools aimed at highlighting the importance of financial aid in the pursuit of post-secondary education;
- ▶ Regional partnerships should be fostered between families, schools, post-secondary institutions, and providers of financial aid support services, and a catalog of regional financial aid application completion events should be maintained; and
- ▶ The LDE should create a financial aid unit that could be delivered within a career readiness or other applicable course that is dedicated to providing students a basic understanding of the financial aid process and the types of funding available for post-secondary education and training.



# Financial Aid Working Group – Final Recommendations

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- ▶ **Recommendation 1:** Inform students and families about financial aid eligibility and opportunities throughout students' high school career
- ▶ **Recommendation 2:** Ensure financial aid planning support services are consistently updated and accessible for students and their families
- ▶ **Recommendation 3:** Stakeholders should foster meaningful partnerships that leverage the unique competencies of each group and provide families and communities with financial aid assistance specifically tailored to their needs

# Financial Aid Working Group – Final Recommendations

## **Recommendation 1:** Inform students and families about financial aid eligibility and opportunities throughout students' high school career

- ▶ School counselors should begin speaking to students about the benefits and financial costs associated with postsecondary education and training in their freshmen and sophomore years of high school;
- ▶ School counselors and students should be informed about the circumstances in which a student may complete a FAFSA and receive financial aid without his parents' cooperation;
- ▶ The LDOE and local school districts should create a financial aid unit in the Louisiana Career Education Model dedicated to giving students a rudimentary understanding of the financial aid process and types of funding available for postsecondary education and training (*Approximate date: Fall 2017*);
- ▶ A calendar of financial aid events occurring in each region of the state should be maintained and advertised to schools and families regularly (*Approximate date: Fall 2016*);
- ▶ A checklist of all documents required to complete the FAFSA should be maintained and advertised to schools and families regularly (*Approximate date: Fall 2016*);
- ▶ A list of helpful links and other resources to assist families in completing the FAFSA should be maintained and advertised to schools and families regularly (*Approximate date: Fall 2016*);
- ▶ Relevant stakeholders should identify and/or provide opportunities for families to receive one-on-one FAFSA completion assistance (*Approximate date: Winter 2017*); and
- ▶ The Louisiana Department of Revenue should explore the feasibility of developing a mechanism on the state income tax form whereby parents could consent to their personal financial information being linked to their child's FAFSA.

# Financial Aid Working Group – Final Recommendations

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## **Recommendation 2:** Ensure financial aid planning support services are consistently updated and accessible for students and their families

- ▶ The LDOE, in conjunction with other stakeholders, should maintain a catalogue of financial aid support services and contact information, so that students and families can easily access sources of financial aid information (*Approximate date: Fall 2016*);
- ▶ LOSFA should aggressively promote its agreement with the USDOE, which allows LOSFA to communicate FAFSA completers with each district in the state, so that school counselors may target those students who have not completed the FAFSA (*Approximate date: Fall 2016 – Winter 2017*);
- ▶ The LDOE should research the viability of syncing FAFSA completion with the Student Transcript System (STS) (*Approximate date: Fall 2016*); and
- ▶ The LDOE should make a concerted effort to draw on the knowledge and expertise of third-party providers of FAFSA completion services as the financial aid application completion policy is implemented over the next several years.

# Financial Aid Working Group – Final Recommendations

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**Recommendation 3:** Stakeholders should foster meaningful partnerships that leverage the unique competencies of each group and provide families and communities with financial aid assistance specifically tailored to their needs

- ▶ School districts should seek out partnerships with tax preparer groups, so that parents may simultaneously complete their taxes and their child's FAFSA, thus lessening some of the burdens associated with FAFSA completion;
- ▶ Postsecondary institutions and school districts should partner to organize events aimed at educating students and families of financial aid eligibility and the potential costs associated with pursuing postsecondary education and training;
- ▶ Identify partnership opportunities to host combined college application and FAFSA completion events in October of each year;
- ▶ Stakeholders should develop strategies that address the specific needs of students from economically-disadvantaged families, international students, and English language learners in the financial aid process.

# Next Steps

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- ▶ **Working Group members** look forward to partner with LDOE program offices to support implementation.
- ▶ **The Louisiana Department of Education** has reviewed the recommendations and has taken or plans to take steps to address each.
- ▶ **The Louisiana Department of Education** will publish, “*The State of Financial Aid in Louisiana*,” an annual report that will show the rate of financial aid completion amongst high school seniors, and highlight those districts and individual schools with the highest completion rates.