

## **Opening Remarks**

### **State Superintendent John White**

### **New Orleans, Louisiana**

On behalf of the state of Louisiana, on behalf of its 50,000 educators, its 1,400 schools, and its 800,000 school children, welcome to the 2014 Teacher Leaders Summit.

Over the next two days, we will immerse ourselves in a special kind of community, one with great diversity but also a powerful and common bond: belief in the great potential of young people and in the ability of educators to unlock that potential.

This Teacher Leader event is truly led by teachers. Louisiana teachers designed this event. Louisiana teachers created each session. Louisiana teachers will be leading each session. And I'd like to take a minute to thank all of the Louisiana educators who made this day happen. If you are a Teacher Leader Advisor, or if you're leading a session today or tomorrow, would you please stand and be recognized so that we can thank you for your efforts here today.

I come here today invigorated by one simple idea: that our children in Louisiana are as smart and capable as any in America, that God has bestowed on them gifts as great as those of any children on Earth, and we owe it to them to provide an education that is as challenging and as fulfilling as they would be provided anywhere else.

I come here today inspired by the idea that when we provide our children with the opportunity to achieve high expectations, they rise to meet that opportunity.

I come here today to join with you in awareness that we can do more to lift our expectations, that there is no reason why a child in another state should learn skills more advanced than should our own.

I come here today to join with you and to make these things right. I come here today because of what we owe our children.

Colleagues, four years ago we made a promise to our children that we would take them on a journey to new heights.

In 2010, we committed to learning standards that focus on the skills kids need to succeed in college and in working life after college.

In 2012, we challenged ourselves with student learning targets and a call for student engagement and higher order questions in the classroom.

In 2013, we introduced assessments that require students to use evidence and to explain their reasoning.

In 2014, we created curricula that align what gets taught with what gets tested.

In 2015, for the first time, we will be able to compare the results of our efforts with results in classrooms across America.

Patiently and gradually, over the decade to follow, we will heighten expectations for ourselves, such that by 2025, when this year's kindergartners are seniors in high school, the average performance in a school rated A will be 'mastery,' fully prepared to succeed in college, completing this journey.

That is what we owe our children.

But I come here today not just for that. I come here today also because of what we owe you, our educators, our champions for children.

There is so much lip service paid to the idea of honoring teachers, but there is too little follow through.

And I want to share with you some specific things while I am here with you today because I believe these are the things we owe teachers here and now in the state of Louisiana.

First, I believe when we leave here and drive home 3 miles to the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, 30 miles to the Northshore, or 300 miles to Shreveport, we owe you time to keep learning. Not just time over the summer, but time, everyday – productive time to learn with colleagues, every school day.

Administrators, I am calling on you to please make time for teachers to lead. Please elevate these teacher leaders to help other teachers learn. Please prioritize their potential and their knowledge. It is too rare that we do this today, and yet we must if we are to succeed.

Second, we owe you the finest tools possible for your profession. Yes, relevant and abundant technology. Yes, challenging curriculum. And yes, having done these things, tests that are good for teachers just as they are good for kids.

I know we don't have standardized tests because they are fun or everyone loves taking them. We have them because they are tools to help us understand the truth of our students' achievements and of our own efforts in the classroom.

We have tests because if we believe our children are just as smart and capable as any in this nation, we will verify that we are allowing them to live up to this promise.

And so long as we have them, we owe you, as professionals, better tests than those we have provided you and your students before.

We owe you tests, first and foremost, that measure the standards we ask you to teach. Not more, not less.

We owe you tests that address the content of your grade level rather than work students did years before they ever came to your classroom.

We owe you tests that come not just at the end of the year but also at the beginning, tests that help you to see what a student needs to learn in the year to come, not just how the student did at year's end.

We owe you tests that ask your students to write, because we adults don't fill out bubbles all day when we go to work.

We owe you tests that when they ask students to write, also ask students to reason because that's what we adults do when we're at our best.

We owe you tests that use technology to help students with disabilities in every way possible.

We owe you tests that provide you and your students' families a full view of what is actually on the test before it is taken.

And we owe you and those parents an honest view of how the kids you serve and love are doing compared to their peers from across the country.

We owe you these things year in and year out, with no uncertainty as you come into a school year how you and your students will be assessed at the end of that year.

Which brings me to the third thing we owe you.

Two weeks ago 45,000 students tried out such a test in our state. One month before that, 300,000 students completed transition LEAP and iLEAP tests aligned with the same standards. In the months before that, your schools and districts chose new, ambitious curricula for the next school year.

For years, we have been walking this journey.

Each leg of the trip has provided some challenge, some doubt, some controversy.

Now, as we turn the final corner, we see a long, straight road ahead.

And we policy makers owe teachers consistency. Now we owe you clarity. Now we owe you time to settle in and lead the way.

Here in front of me today are 4,000 people who have stepped up to the lead the long and final leg of this journey.

You should be able to trust that the standards and curricula and guidebooks and rubrics and frameworks and targets and, yes, the tests, that you study here in New Orleans over the next two days will be part of the Louisiana plan this year and for the years to come.

You should not have to fear last minute switches. You should have certainty at this moment in time.

And so it is my commitment to you today that I, our Department, our state board of education – we will stand up for the idea that, like your kids, you deserve clarity, you deserve a long-term plan, you deserve not to have standards and curriculum and assessment tossed about in the morning headlines like they can be changed with the waving of a magic wand.

These are the tools of our livelihoods, of our profession. They are tools we use to change lives. It is time to take them out of the headlines and hand them back to the students and the classroom educators.

I thank you for being a classroom educator. I thank you for being a Teacher Leader. There is no higher calling. There is no more important journey.

God bless you, and God bless Louisiana's children. Have a wonderful two days in New Orleans.