

COUNSELOR CONNECT



A Publication for
Louisiana's Professional
SCHOOL COUNSELORS

In This Issue

Counselor Spotlight: Phaedra Cusic

Student Opportunities

Professional Opportunities

Middle and High School News

In Case You Missed It

Counselor Spotlight: Phaedra Cusic



In our work as school counselors we all see kids who struggle with anger issues, depression, anxiety, grief, substance abuse, homelessness, and absent or deceased parents. For those of us who work with at-risk youths, these issues are often the focus of our daily work.

I have been a school counselor at the Youth Challenge Program (YCP), Gillis Long for 17 years-almost the entire span of the program's existence! I can't say that it has not been a challenge, but I have learned so much working here. During the five-month residential phase of our program, students attend daily classes with certified instructors and work at their own pace to improve their math and reading skills. Those students who meet state eligibility requirements are provided the opportunity to test for their high school equivalency diploma. Our most recent academic initiative is our CCCR (Course Choice Credit Recovery) program. This program allows our Cadets to

work on individual high school course work while focusing on the content they need in order to catch up with their peers and recover credits. Supporting these students as they reclaim their lives has taught me how important it is to be observant of our young people.

As school counselors we understand that there are reasons some teens act out. We recognize that there are factors that lead them to act the way that they do. What I try to do is establish a relationship, ask the right questions, share stories of other cadets' struggles and successes. I also throw in a dose of humor to make them feel comfortable. I have learned that many of our cadets have gone through some trauma at a very young age. Some have been verbally, physically or sexually abused. Over the years it appears that more and more of our young people are suffering from a variety of issues, and I feel fortunate to work in an environment that allows us to really focus on the needs of every individual student.

I continue working at YCP because I love what I do and I care about our teens. I am passionate about reaching them in any way that I can, and it brings me joy to see them succeed and feel that they have accomplished something at the end of the cycle. Years later, when we hear from our students and see how much we helped them change their lives, it makes it worth the time and effort. With so much

negativity surrounding us, I feel that we counselors are so fortunate to have found a way to contribute to the world in such a meaningful, rewarding way.

Phaedra Cusic
School Counselor, Youth Challenge Program Gillis Long

Student Opportunities

U. S. Presidential Scholars Program

The nomination process for the [U.S. Presidential Scholars Program](#) is now open. This joint program of The Louisiana Department of Education and the United States Department of Education honors our nation's most distinguished graduating high school seniors.

The [U. S. Presidential Scholars program information guide](#) provides key details about the program and submission procedures. School systems may submit for consideration up to two students in the General Component and up to two students in the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Component. School systems are required to submit to the Department a [parental release form](#) and nomination letter for each nominated student by 4 p.m. November 13. Please submit these documents to jumpstart@la.gov with U. S. Presidential Scholar Program in the subject line. Nomination letters are not to exceed one page for each student.

Please visit the [LDOE Award Programs page](#) for more information; email cathy.stromain@la.gov with questions.

U.S. Senate Youth Scholarship

The Louisiana Department of Education and the [William Randolph Hearst Foundation](#) are pleased to announce the launch of the 2021 Virtual United States Senate Youth Program. Two outstanding students from Louisiana will be selected to participate in a series of online meetings during the week of March 15, 2021, and both delegates will receive a \$10,000 college scholarship from the Hearst Foundation.

Please encourage juniors or seniors who hold elected or appointed offices in school or community groups listed in the [national program brochure](#) to submit a Louisiana application packet. If students are unable to hold leadership positions this year due to the pandemic, they can qualify based on offices they held during the 2019-2020 academic year. For test security reasons, the test secure essay topics will only be released to school systems and will not be available on our website. **High school personnel should contact marian.johnson@la.gov as soon as a student requests the essay topics.**

The names of the students selected by each high school and their application portfolios must be emailed to marian.johnson@la.gov no later than November 16, 2020. Finalists will be notified by December 4, 2020, for the December 15 final phase of selection process.

Virtual Entrepreneur Pitch Competition

In the virtual [Blue Ocean High School Entrepreneurship Competition](#) individual students or teams pitch their innovative business concepts to experienced entrepreneurs and business people, receive feedback on their ideas, join a community of like-minded students, and compete for thousands in cash prizes. Last year, 762 students from 127 high schools in 13 different countries participated in the competition. Blue Ocean offers prize money for students or schools and the competition is free to educators, students and schools. Schools and students can win up to \$1,000 in prize money. The due date for pitch submissions is February 19, 2021. Please visit the Blue Ocean [website](#) for more information.

Students of the Year Program Reminders

The application for the 2021 Student of the Year program is now available, and all school systems are encouraged to participate. The following steps are required for school systems:

1. Submit the [School System Information Form](#) to Marian Johnson.
2. Make the [Student Application Packet](#) available to the parents of eligible students.

Please refer to the [recording](#) of the Student of the Year webinar for more information; email marian.johnson@la.gov with questions.

Professional Opportunities

Updates: LDOE Virtual Fall Counselor Institute

The LDOE Counselor Institutes are an opportunity for the Department to provide updates to school counselors across the state. The Fall 2020 Institute will be offered in a webinar format on October 28 and 29.

Agenda

Assessment and Accountability
Financial Aid
Youth Challenge Program
Community Service Diploma Endorsement
Credit Recovery Updates
College Credit Opportunities
Jump Start 2.0

Date and time: October 28 at 9:00 a.m.

Webinar link: <https://ldoe.zoom.us/j/99489510512?pwd=SFhYdXNCEVI6bjlvaWpYeVYvRFJ2dz09>

Meeting ID: 994 8951 0512

Phone: 312-626-6799 **Passcode:** 832444

One tap mobile: +13126266799,,99489510512#,,,,,0#,,832444#

Date and time: October 29 at 8:00 a.m.

Webinar link: <https://ldoe.zoom.us/j/98233548776?pwd=bStTVlhMVGU5NTILL2xnUGthZFBWQT09>

Meeting ID: 982 3354 8776

Phone: 312-626-6799 **Passcode:** 100322

One tap mobile: +13126266799,,98233548776#,,,,,0#,,100322#

Date and time: October 29 at 12:00 p.m.

Webinar link: <https://ldoe.zoom.us/j/97179412692?pwd=UWN4SEFScVBGbnREOVNvdndtMG9zUT09>

Meeting ID: 971 7941 2692

Phone: 312-626-6799 **Passcode:** 268597

One tap mobile: +13126266799,,97179412692#,,,,,0#,,268597#

Participants should set aside three hours on the day/time they want to participate. **This is the same webinar offered at three different times, and advanced registration is not required.** Please email leslie.gilliland@la.gov for more information.

Jump Start Virtual Convention

The 2021 Jump Start Convention will be held virtually on the afternoons of January 26 and 27. This year's theme will be "Inspire. Innovate. Impact." The LDOE is looking forward to sharing updated resources and information related to Jump Start implementation. Registration details will be announced on October 27. Please email questions to jumpstart@la.gov.

EWS Certification from Johns Hopkins University

Talent Development Secondary (TDS) is seeking partners to engage in an [AT&T Aspire-funded project](#) to implement early warning systems (EWS) in high schools.

To be eligible, a school system/CMO should have three to five high schools with a four-year cohort graduation rate below 85%. Smaller school systems may partner with other school systems in their region. **Up to ten administrators and school staff will earn a certification from Johns Hopkins University's Everyone Graduates Center as EWS Coordinators.** Please visit the program [web page](#) or email tmadden@tdschools.org for more information.

Middle and High School News

Federal Policy on Military Recruiting in Schools

Representatives of military recruiting offices have recently contacted the Department to express concerns regarding access to student contact information. By federal law according to 20 U.S.C. 7908, all school systems that receive funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) must provide student's names, addresses, and telephone listings to military recruiters unless the student's parents or guardians have individually opted out of providing this information. Local education authorities cannot adopt a blanket opt-out policy and 20 U.S.C. 7908 supersedes any conflicting state law.

In addition, please be mindful that schools are to allow recruiters from the various branches of service equitable access to classrooms and/or facilities. School systems must allow equal access and accommodation to all branches of services in accordance with a consistent application of their local policies. Students interested in joining the military after high school should be allowed to receive information from all branches of service so they can make an intelligent decision if they are considering joining the military.

Please share this information with the principals and counselors in your high schools to ensure your district is in compliance with federal law.

Financial Aid Support

The [FAFSA](#) for the 2020-2021 school year opened on October 1, 2020, and the [Louisiana Department of Education \(LDOE\)](#), the [Louisiana Education Loan Authority \(LELA\)](#), and the [Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance \(LOSFA\)](#) are available to lend support. Please email any or all of these offices to discuss your needs.

- LDOE: ldefinancialaid@la.gov
- LELA: carmichael@lpfa.com
- LOSFA: breanna.paul@la.gov

Quest for Success

Quest for Success hybrid resources are being developed to help facilitate school systems that are offering the course in a hybrid or 100% virtual environment. All of the resources can be located on the [LDOE Quest for Success website](#).

- [Quest Hybrid Resources PDF](#)
- [Quest for Success Alternate Activities Unit 2 Webinar Recording](#)
- [Unit 2 Modified Student Resource PDF](#)
- [Unit 2 Modified Teacher Guide PDF](#)
- [Unit 3 Modified Student Resource PDF](#)
- [Unit 3 Modified Teacher Guide PDF](#)
- [Digital Engineering Design Journal](#)

Please email tedrick.holmes@la.gov for more information.

In Case You Missed It

[LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RELEASES ACT RESULTS FOR CLASS OF 2020](#) (Louisiana Believes)

[ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT KEN BRADFORD UPDATES BESE ON OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THEIR COMMUNITY & EARN A DIPLOMA SEAL](#) (@La_Believes)

[OPINION: COUNSELORS NEED REAL SUPPORT](#) (Inside Higher Ed)

[LOSFA LAUNCHES PILOT URGING HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS TO COMPLETE FAFSA BY FEBRUARY 1](#) (Louisiana Believes)

[FOURTH ANNUAL #WHYAPPLY DAY INSPIRES THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS TO APPLY TO COLLEGE](#) (ACT, Inc.)

[CAROL DWECK ON NURTURING STUDENTS' GROWTH MINDSETS THROUGH PROTEST AND PANDEMIC](#) (Education Week)