

COUNSELOR CONNECT

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Professional School Counselors



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Welcome to the “happiest season of all.” For many this time of year is full of holiday greetings, marshmallows roasting, mistletoe being hung, parties for hosting and caroling out in the snow and if we are not careful, this holiday season can drain the jolly out of our holly! We hurry and rush looking for the perfect gift, decorating our homes, entertaining family and friends and end up collapsing exhausted from all the festivities. As we reflect upon another long year of face-to-face versus virtual learning, pandemic-related learning gaps, changing masks mandates, threat assessments, and a whole range of other tasks, let’s try to consider that this season carries much busyness for many of us. So, I encourage you to try to take time to slow down and reflect so that we can return to school after our holiday break refreshed for our New Year!

Slow down. This is often easier said than done. We cannot stop the holiday festivities, but in the midst of the chaos around us, we can choose to set a different pace. We can make the season fit our own needs. COVID-19 has provided many “forced opportunities” with our day-to-day jobs and we made changes quickly. When possible, with these “forced opportunities”, embrace the good, tweak the issues, and for some of the opportunities, we have learned a better, new way and for others, we make changes when necessary.

Reflect. As we slow down, reflect on the good. It is all about our perspective. Purposefully focus on the good memories from the past year. Dwell on the positive ones. Yes, for many this can be hard, but search for the good. It is there. Remember the smiles and laughter in the faces of the students you have helped along the way by speaking truth and life into their situation. Even in the hard times, you are making a difference. Capture those moments and let them fill your heart during this time with your family and friends.

Remember your purpose. We have been given a unique platform within our sphere of influence. Use it for the greater good. Be the reason someone sees a glimpse of hope today. Let your passion be the driving force to push you through the difficult times. Remind yourself of your why and continue to renew your passion for your purpose. You play a vital role in each student’s life, whether through a schedule change, a smile, a kind word or a listening ear, you have a purpose and your students need you.

Refresh. Over the winter break, my focus will be enjoying the Christmas holidays with my family. I wish all of you joy this season, whether it is from surrounding yourself with loved ones or taking time for yourself. I hope that all of us can be grateful for the opportunities we have to make a difference each day and that we remember not to let them pass us by. Let us end this year by focusing on the difference we have made in

the lives of many. And next year, may we all returned to our school family refreshed- with more determination, passion, and energy to walk out our purpose.

Barbara Gray, School Counselor
West Monroe High School
Louisiana School Counselor of the Year

Student Opportunities

Kids' Chance Scholarship

The Louisiana Bar Foundation (LBF) Kids' Chance Scholarship program provides scholarships to the children of Louisiana workers who were killed or permanently and totally disabled in an accident compensable under a state or federal Workers' Compensation Act or law. Students who meet the basic [eligibility requirements](#) may [apply now](#) through **February 11, 2022**:

- Must be a dependent of a worker killed or permanently and totally disabled in an accident compensable under a state or federal Worker's Compensation Act or law.
- Must be a Louisiana resident between the ages of 16 and 25.
- Must maintain a "C" average or higher.
- Must demonstrate substantial financial need.
- Must be pursuing a primary college or university degree (bachelor's or associate's) or vocational education and training (certificate or license) from an accredited Louisiana* university, community, technical or vocational college and/or state approved proprietary school.
*An exception may be made for attendance at an accredited out-of-state institution for extraordinary reasons.

Visit the [Kids' Chance web page](#) for more information about this opportunity.

Louisiana 811 Scholarship

The mission of [Louisiana 811](#) is to support the protection of its members' facilities, the public, and the environment by providing excellent damage prevention services in a cost-effective manner. To advance this mission, the organization is awarding **\$811 scholarships to Louisiana high school seniors**.

Eligibility: Applicants must be Louisiana students who are planning to attend a community college, accredited trade school, or a four-year accredited college or university by Fall 2022.

Application Guidelines: The application requires the student to complete an [online application form](#) that includes a brief essay portion that asks students to describe how they would deliver and how they would stress the importance of the 811 Message, "Call Before You Dig" to their peer group and/or family members. All applications are due by 5 p.m. on **Friday, March 18, 2022**. Applications received after the due date or not submitted in their entirety will not be considered. Winners will be announced by a combination of phone, email and written letter.

Visit www.scholarship.louisiana811.com for details; email Cole Vanderlick, Manager Damage Prevention, at cole@laonecall.com.

Professional Opportunities

2022 Jump Start Convention Updates

The Jump Start Convention is currently at capacity. A [waiting list](#) is open, and as tickets become available, those on the waiting list will have the opportunity to secure tickets on a first-come, first-served basis. As a courtesy to Convention attendees, the Department has reserved hotel blocks at several neighboring hotels. Visit the Jump Start Meetings and Training Opportunities [web page](#) for reservation information. Please email questions to erica.spencer@la.gov.

Spring 2022 LDOE Counselor Institute Updates

The LDOE Spring 2022 Counselor Institutes will take place during National School Counseling Week, February 7-11, 2022. Although these regional events are best suited for middle and high school counselors, all are welcome to attend. Participants should plan to attend **only one meeting**.

	8 - 11 a.m.	1 - 4 p.m.
February 8	Ouachita Parish	Bossier Parish
February 9	Rapides Parish	Lafayette Parish
February 10	TBD	Livingston Parish

Registration opens January 10. Please email questions to leslie.gilliland@la.gov.

Middle and High School News

2021-2022 Graduate Diploma and Seal Orders

All diploma requests for 2021-2022 graduates must be submitted electronically to the [Diploma and Seal Order Form](#) by February 4, 2022. **Only one form should be completed for each school system.** The Department will cover the costs for the initial order and distribution. Please email questions to megan.thompson2@la.gov.

Reminder: Fast Forward

[Fast Forward](#) is a program that allows students to earn an associate degree or participate in a state approved pre-apprenticeship/apprenticeship in high school. There are currently [39 BESE-approved pathways](#) which can be used statewide with the approved postsecondary and apprenticeship organizations. Assistance is available for schools/school systems that want to adopt a currently approved pathway or begin developing new pathways to present for approval. There are regional webinars the second week of each month for schools/school systems. Please contact stephanie.marcum@la.gov with questions or to get the links for technical assistance sessions.

Reminder: Financial Aid Planning

The [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) opened on October 1. Completing the application early is imperative to ensure students get the maximum aid available to them. Schools/school systems can get live, phone or online assistance with FAFSA completion events from the Department. FAFSA completion or having a waiver on file is a requirement for graduation and to count in the graduation cohort. Please contact ldefinancialaid@la.gov for more information or to set up an assistance visit.

In Case You Missed It

[LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION NAMES RAPIDES PARISH SCHOOLS "MODELS OF EXCELLENCE" RECIPIENT](#) (Louisiana Believes)

[GEN Z MOST STRESSED BY CORONAVIRUS, CITING PANDEMIC TOLL ON CAREERS, EDUCATION AND RELATIONSHIPS, POLL SAYS](#) (Washington Post)