

COUNSELOR CONNECT

A Publication for Louisiana's
Professional School Counselors

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School counselors are often called on to serve in many roles. As challenging as some of these roles may be, they all have a purpose and all contribute to our number one goal, which is to serve the needs of our students.

Stepping Up and Filling In

When I first answered the call to school counseling, it was to assist my daughter's high school when two counselors retired in the same year. I volunteered to serve the needs of our students and protect the integrity of the school counseling program the best I could. I loved the work so much that I eventually completed the certification process at Louisiana State University Shreveport and joined the profession with open eyes. I had already seen firsthand how often the work of a school counselor is to recognize what has to be done and to step up to make sure it happens. Every one of us has our own experiences, and we share in the knowledge that sometimes the unexpected calls to action are the most compelling.

Advocating for Ourselves and Each Other

When I accepted that first school counseling position, the principal told me, "If you advocate for these students as you have for your own child, you will change the trajectory of school counseling." I held on to those inspiring words, not knowing just how many opportunities I would have to advocate for my students and community and for the profession itself. Eight years later, I am the president of the Louisiana School Counselor Association (LSCA)—a platform for advocacy beyond what I could have imagined. From those

beginnings to today, I have learned from my peers and from professionals at the state and national levels that advocacy is perhaps one of the most important roles in the profession.

Answering the Call

As I reflect on my own unconventional entrance into the profession and consider our current work to establish a professional identity, my message is unchanged: "Answer the Call." We know that our efforts to maintain a comprehensive school counseling program not only strengthen our school community, they sharpen the skills that make us transformative educational leaders. We must continually remind ourselves that school counseling is a calling, not just a job.

It is my sincere hope that wherever you are, under whatever title, that you are fulfilling your dreams as a school counselor, meeting the needs of students in your community, and striving to improve our profession. Please remember that LSCA is here to support you in your unwavering commitment to this noble profession.

Kesha M. Simmons, M.Ed., PLPC
Behavior Intervention Specialist for Caddo Parish Public Schools
Founder of YouToo, Inc.
Managing Partner of The Family Connection Center
LSCA President 2021

Operational Guidance

Office of State Fire Marshal Updated COVID Fire Drill Memo

Please share with superintendents and school administration.

The Office of the State Fire Marshal has issued updated guidance related to conducting emergency drills in the school setting during COVID. The [memo](#) outlines the procedures that schools should take when practicing fire drills and other emergency drills this school year.

Please contact LDOECOVID19support@la.gov with questions.

Louisiana Department of Health School COVID Reporting Guidelines

Please share with superintendents and school administrators.

The Louisiana Department of Health is continuing the statewide reporting system for all school-associated cases of COVID-19 for the 2021-2022 school year. This system is intended to record COVID-related illness in schools and provide schools with a platform to document case information, assisting in their ability to mitigate the potential for school spread. School systems should continue to report positive COVID-19 cases in the school reporting system. LDH has provided a [School Reporting Guide](#), along with [other resources](#).

Please email questions to schoolcovidreporting@la.gov.

BinaxNOW™ Testing Resources

The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) has BinaxNOW Rapid Testing kits available upon request for school systems to access when a CLIA Waived Certificate Number or community health provider has

been identified. In order to access these test kits, school systems will need a designated point of contact to complete a survey. School systems that would like to request BinaxNOW Rapid Testing kits should [complete this survey](#) to indicate interest.

Please reach out to Arundhati.Bakshi@la.gov at LDH with any questions.

Ready to Achieve! School Operational Plans Submission Update

Please share with superintendents.

An LEA that receives ARP ESSER funds must, within 30 days of receiving the funds, make publicly available on its website a **Ready to Achieve! plan** for safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services. School systems can also meet the 30 day requirement by seeking public comment and updating their Strong Start 2020 plans to reflect the [Ready to Achieve 2021-2022 guidance](#). School systems should be updating their Ready to Achieve! plan with the latest LDH and CDC guidance as outlined in [Louisiana's Ready to Achieve! Guidance](#). All updates within Louisiana's Ready to Achieve! 2021-2022 Guidance are highlighted in yellow. **School systems will [submit a link](#) to their plan to LDOE no later than September 10.**

Please contact LDOECOVID19support@la.gov with questions.

National Attendance Awareness Month

September is National Attendance Awareness Month. Nationally, an estimated 5 to 7.5 million students are at risk academically each year because they are chronically absent—missing 10 percent or more of school days; this includes excused and unexcused absences. Starting as early as kindergarten and prekindergarten, chronic absence can have adverse consequences for academic achievement.

The Department is demonstrating its commitment to addressing chronic absenteeism in Louisiana:

- new hire of a Child Welfare and Attendance Liaison;
- Louisiana Attendance Alliance, a collaboration with the LSU Social Research and Evaluation Center; and
- grant opportunities for access to Drop-Out and Early Warning Systems.

During the month of September, Child Welfare and Attendance Professionals across the state will be engaging with their school systems to promote attendance and best practices. Schools, students and families will be acknowledged for maintaining high attendance.

Student Opportunities

U.S. Senate Youth Scholarship

Two outstanding Louisiana students will be selected to participate in the [2022 United States Senate Youth Program](#), which includes attending Washington Week in March of 2022 (virtually or in person, pending health and safety guidelines) and receiving a \$10,000 college scholarship from [Hearst Foundations](#).

Please encourage juniors and seniors who hold elected or appointed offices in school or community groups listed in the [national program brochure](#) to submit a Louisiana [application packet](#), and ensure students understand the eligibility requirements and program rules.

High school personnel should contact marian.johnson@la.gov as soon as a student request is made for the essay topics; **application portfolios must be emailed to the program coordinator no later than October 5, 2021**. Please see the [application packet](#) for details; email marian.johnson@la.gov for assistance.

Professional Opportunities

Fall 2021 Counselor Institutes

The LDOE Fall 2021 Counselor Institutes are scheduled to take place October 19 through 21. 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**. Contact leslie.gilliland@la.gov with questions.

	8 - 11 a.m.	1 - 4 p.m.
October 19	Bossier City	West Monroe
October 20	Alexandria	Youngsville
October 21	New Orleans	Livingston

Gifted and Talented Coordinators Welcome Back to School Webinar

Please share with appropriate personnel.

A back-to-school webinar has been scheduled to discuss information relevant to gifted and talented programming for the 2021-2022 school year. The webinar will provide an overview of the school system information form, regulatory resources, waivers, identification procedures and upcoming talented evaluator and protocol trainings.

- **Webinar Date and Time:** September 2 at 10 a.m.
- **Webinar Link:** <https://ldoe.zoom.us/j/99245242216>
- **Webinar Phone Number:** 1-312-626-6799
- **Meeting ID#:** 992 4524 2216

Please email questions to marian.johnson@la.gov.

ACT Counselor Toolkit

With the new [ACT Counselor Toolkit](#), school counselors can download the free [2021-2022 Counselor's Guide](#); learn more about the [Student Success Recognition Clubs Toolkit](#); and sign up to receive their free Back-to-School Kit, which includes a pop-up cube, door poster, and magnet. Please view the [ACT Counselor Toolkit and Student Recognition Toolkit](#) video or email Renee.Hartley@act.org for more information.

ACT College and Career Readiness Workshops

ACT is offering its national and state-specific College and Career Readiness Workshops completely virtually in 2021. Workshop topics include ACT district testing, Mosaic/social emotional learning, online reporting, PreACT and PreACT 8/9, ACT test prep and certified educators, and WorkKeys. Visit the [ACT workshop page](#) to register.

School Counselor Survey

Louisiana School Counselor Association (LSCA) is gathering feedback to ensure that the organization is hearing the needs of Louisiana School Counselors and providing needed support. Please follow [this link](#) to complete the survey. Data gained will be used to educate the LSCA Executive Board and improve its guidance.

Middle and High School News

2021-2022 Course Choice/SCA Catalog

Course Choice provides students and schools with access to a broad variety of course offerings from online, face-to-face, industry training and dual enrollment course providers. The [SCA Portal](#) is now open for 2021-2022 reporting.

The 2021-2022 [Course Choice Provider Directory](#) is now available. Schools register students directly with the course provider college and/or university. Please refer to the [Course Choice Registration Procedures](#) for details on this process. Once students are registered, schools should document enrollments in the Course Choice Reporting System.

The [SCA Portal](#) closes at 5 p.m. on September 13 for Private Provider Fall and Full Year enrollments. Higher Education enrollments must be reported by 5 p.m. on October 8. The portal will reopen for Spring enrollments on November 22.

Please contact sca@la.gov with questions.

In Case You Missed It

[LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION LAUNCHES ACADEMIC RECOVERY AND ACCELERATION “COMEBACK” CAMPAIGN](#) (Louisiana Believes)

[THE LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RELEASES NEW LEAP 2025 DATA](#) (Louisiana Believes)

[STUDENT LOAN ADVICE FROM A PERSONAL AND FAMILY FINANCE SPECIALIST](#) (Investopedia)

[CONFLICT & COVID-19: MEET THE SCHOOL COUNSELORS ON THE FRONTLINE IN GAZA HELPING KIDS LEARN](#) (Global Citizen)