

For immediate release

New Public Education Coalition Working To Make Louisiana First in Education

Covington, LA – The new state-wide **Coalition for Louisiana Public Education**, consisting of major education stake-holders, has united in working toward the goal that *“Louisiana will be a national leader in traditional public education.”* The new think tank’s coalition members have begun working together with elected officials toward major legislative initiatives with a dual objective -- to propel Louisiana toward national pre-eminence in public education, which will subsequently boost Louisiana economically.

Contrary to adhering to “the status quo,” these Coalition members are committed to helping state legislators and education administrators make the hard decisions, guaranteeing equitable education opportunities for all children, to set Louisiana on a path to national excellence.

For the first time a unique coalition consisting of the heads of major diverse statewide education organizations have all joined together to make Louisiana first in education, and to channel factual information to legislators, the business community, the media and the general public.

The new **Coalition for Louisiana Public Education** with the aim of *“Putting Louisiana First!”* already has a long list of charter members, encompassing a broad spectrum of credentialed education professionals.

The organization includes leaders of the: **Louisiana School Boards Association** (LSBA); **Louisiana Association of School Superintendents** (LASS); **Louisiana Association of School Executives** (LASE); **Louisiana Association of Educators** (LAE); **Louisiana Federation of Teachers** (LFT); **Louisiana Retired Teachers Association**, (LRTA); founder/board chairman and directors of **Research on Reform, Inc.**; and the creator of the blog **“Louisiana Educator.”** More groups have petitioned to participate as the Coalition moves forward.

The brainchild of **Jack Loup**, President, St. Tammany Parish School Board, the Coalition came together because “everyone was saying we all need to sit down together, but nobody was doing it. The state constitution says the Louisiana Legislature has the responsibility for public education, and we aim to help them with that.”

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Add one – New Coalition:

Sharing a broad set of common beliefs, the Coalition members realize that their own diversity could present a challenge.

However, Coalition member **Steve Monaghan**, President of LFT, said at the initial meeting, “While we all have small differences, as professionals we can all agree on the major educational issues.”

Working in unique collaboration, the Coalition educators agree that the current state decision-making for public schools isn’t producing high quality results and is perhaps working on a different agenda.

Coalition member, **Dr. James Taylor**, President of the Louisiana Retired Teachers Association, observed, “What we see in the state leadership is simple, capitalistic ideology, a kind of ‘Disaster Capitalism,’ not an emphasis on quality education.” Taylor, who has taught at all levels including post secondary, added, “Right now, our state leadership is not giving us well-prepared students.”

Fellow Coalition member **Charles Hatfield**, Analyst with Research on Reforms, Inc., described the state’s posture on education as “market-driven propaganda, a sort of ‘gain’ game with school performance scores perpetuating a myth to the public.”

Joe Potts, President Emeritus, Jefferson Federation of Teachers, another Coalition member, added “Why should schools need to be run more like a business, when it is well documented that more than half of all businesses fail?”

Working in a spirit of collaboration and cooperation, the Coalition members find fault with a state system that pits schools against other schools, and districts against districts, as occurred in 2010’s *Race to the Top* competition.

Coalition member and **Louisiana House Representative J. Rogers Pope**, R-District 71, who also serves as head of the Louisiana Association of School Executives, observed that “The current situation divides Higher Ed against K-12 education.”

Also a Coalition member, **Mike Deshotels**, the *Louisiana Educator*, former Executive Director of the Louisiana Association of Educators, commented: “Schools have been separated within districts; parents at one school competing with parents at another ;it’s ‘Divide and Conquer’ all over again.”

Speaking for the Louisiana School Boards Association, Executive Director **Nolton Senegal**, a Coalition member, said, “The Louisiana School Board Association is committed to working with all educators in doing what is in the best interest of the children we serve. Louisiana’s children deserve the

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Add two – New Coalition:

very best, and we are all willing to put our differences aside, and pull in the same direction. When “what’s in the best interest for the children” is used for the guide, we will always make the right decision.”

Looking at Louisiana, “Why are we letting non-educators tell us how to educate our children,” asked **Taylor**, a charter member of the Coalition.

To make and implement successful education policy decisions, Coalition member **Michael Walker-Jones**, executive director of the Louisiana Association of Educators, stated, “Education professionals need to control this profession.”

Coalition member **Joyce Haynes**, President of the Louisiana Association of Educators, said that all stakeholders should be advocating for and supporting each other as the difficult decisions have to be made. Further, she says, “I’m tired of the misinformation, *repeated over and over*. We need to get the word out, the hard data, to everyone, every parish, every school, every house, every grocery store, every barber shop.”

Dr. Barbara Ferguson, CEO of Research on Reforms, Inc., joined the Coalition and agreed with the concern about misinformation, especially in the area of charter schools. A proponent of opening *all* charter schools to all children, Ferguson said, “The public, which has been deceived into thinking that charter schools are schools of choice, will learn that many charter schools are just another way to try to privatize public education.”

By federal law, all charter schools in the U.S. must have open admission. Ferguson points out, “Many selective-admissions charter schools here are allowed to operate; and these schools boast their test results, leading to the erroneous conclusion that charter schools outperform other schools.”

The new Coalition members are focusing on a prioritized list of critical educational concerns, on which they demand more evidence-based decision-making. They have started to tackle several legislative initiatives, including the following Top Ten current areas of concern:

- **State Revenue** – Coalition members call for a review of the current \$7.1 billion in tax exemptions and a review, and a transparent accounting of the federal EduJobs funding.
- **Reinstatement of the Growth Factor in the Minimum Foundation Plan (MFP)** – Three years of the frozen growth factor in the state’s MFP funding have put local school districts not just at a standstill, but actually three years behind, creating a major de facto **decrease** in state funding.

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Add three – New Coalition:

- **End to Unfunded Mandates** – Mandates without funding drain all school boards without a revenue stream on which to draw, creating yet another de facto cut in state funding.
- **Local Governance** -- All coalition members call for an end to micromanagement by the state in issues best left to local school boards, which offer more transparency and direct accountability to the public which elects them.
- **Accountability at all levels** – Starting at the top, accountability should be required from the governor, the State Superintendent and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education members, for their education policy decisions, which have resulted in questionable outcomes. They should be held accountable for the unsuccessful track record of performance by the Recovery School District (RSD) schools, which even after five years of higher-level resources than those available to the rest of the state, remain at the bottom of the list.
- **School Take-overs into the RSD** – Legislators, who have the constitutional authority for public education, should determine what’s best for the students and tax payers, based on the documented poor performance record of the RSD and put a moratorium on further take-overs.
- **Letter grades for School Districts** – Coalition educators believe the state should hold off implementation on this trend until realistic criteria can be determined before assigning overall evaluation of a particular district.
- **Value-added Assessments for teachers and principals** – Coalition members believe that the state should hold off implementation on employee assessments until realistic criteria reflecting the employee’s actual work experience can be assessed.
- **Student-based Budgeting** – Coalition members believe that the state should place a moratorium on this trendy idea until further study on how the loss of district economies of scale, and the risk of placing educators in the role of financial directors, would ultimately affect a school system’s finances and its educational progress.
- **Retirement and Health Care Cost** – As with other businesses, school districts must support the employees while working to balance the bottom line.

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Add four – New Coalition:

Coalition member **Graig Luscombe**, executive director of the Louisiana Retired Teachers Association, pointed out that “investing in strong, stable public educational opportunities and infrastructures for all students, at all levels, will promote Louisiana as a desirable state for education, business, industry and retirement.”

In agreement, new Coalition member **Michael Walker-Jones**, executive director of the Louisiana Association of Educators, put it, “Beyond just *equitable*, Louisiana must invest in its own future for the *best* results; we must have proven, effective methods in all our public schools.”

Coalition members plan to provide clarity and input on complex education decision-making via providing independent research; releases to the media; a speaker’s bureau; a future website; and a clear line of communication with the legislators and the public.

Several Coalition members stressed the importance of addressing the public’s lack of understanding about the state’s public school system, often due to misinformation or even a lack of information. Their aim is to help clarify issues for the citizens, the business community, the media, and the legislature, as they approach this year’s session, so that education decisions will be made on the basis of fact, not just the latest national trend.

Questions regarding the new coalition can be directed to **Loup**, at jack.loup@stpsb.org or by phone, 985-796-3771.

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