

Louisiana Teacher Recruitment, Recovery, and Retention Task Force

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.

Iowa Room, 1st Floor of the Claiborne Building
1201 N. 3rd St.
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Barry Erwin called the meeting of the Teacher Recruitment, Recovery, and Retention Task Force to order at 1:05 p.m.

ROLL CALL AND INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. Cara Landry called the roll, and a quorum was not established.

Members Present	Affiliation
Rep. Barbara Freiberg	House Committee on Education
Dr. Arthur Joffrion	Louisiana Department of Education
Dr. Kim Hunter Reed	Commissioner of Higher Education
Dr. Paula Calderon	Louisiana Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
Mr. Barry Erwin	Council for a Better Louisiana
Rep. Shaun Mena	Louisiana House of Representatives

Members Absent	Affiliation
Sen. Beth Mizell	Senate Committee on Education
Dr. Janet Pope	Louisiana School Boards Association
Mr. Ronnie Morris	Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
Mr. Mike Faulk	Louisiana Association of School Superintendents
Mr. Bruce Chaffin	Louisiana State Association of School Personnel Administrators
Dr. Keith Courville	Association of Professional Educators of Louisiana
Ms. Cynthia Posey	Louisiana Federation of Teachers
Ms. Gladys Mouton	Louisiana Association of Educators
Mr. Alex Jerrell	Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools
Sen. Rick Edmonds	Louisiana Senate

APPROVAL OF THE AUGUST 14, 2024, MINUTES

A quorum was not established, so consideration of the minutes will be taken up at a future meeting.

TASK FORCE 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Mr. Barry Erwin stated three main priorities the Task Force identified for 2024 to improve education across the state. Related to teacher compensation, Mr. Erwin described the statewide compensation study completed in 2023 by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), which highlighted a need to make the teaching profession competitive and offer differentiated compensation. The second priority mentioned was strengthening the educator pipeline, which the Task Force addressed by improving entry points into the profession and supporting school leaders and preparation providers in recruitment and retention, including investing in teacher leadership roles. The third priority, elevating the teaching profession by promoting the value of teaching, was adopted to encourage more individuals to enter the field and to highlight the impact teachers have on students.

Dr. Reed thanked Mr. Erwin for his comments and thanked the Task Force members and the legislators present, stating the importance of the Task Force Annual Report in providing data to the legislature to address these issues. She then introduced Mr. Patrick Steck from Deans for Impact to present some history and an overview of the work the Task Force has completed. Mr. Steck named three areas the Task Force has affected through its work, starting with the tracking of data necessary to support teacher recruitment and certification, which has helped to increase access for aspiring teachers. Second, he mentioned the emphasis placed on improving the quality of teacher preparation, with support for initiatives like para-to-teacher models and pre-educator pathways. This work has focused not just on increasing the number of teachers, but

also ensuring they are well-prepared and supported. The third item was retention efforts that focus on raising teacher pay, improving compensation, providing leadership opportunities, and increasing mentor teacher stipends to support early-career teachers and reduce turnover. He then celebrated Louisiana's adoption of new teacher preparation models, like registered apprenticeships, while upholding quality standards. Mr. Steck emphasized the need to continue this progress and build on the Task Force's work to avoid focusing solely on quantity and ensure sustained educational improvement. Dr. Reed thanked Mr. Steck for his participation and his contributions to the Task Force.

Dr. Reed introduced Ms. Christy Bellue, Dr. Arthur Joffrion and Dr. Michelle DeMeulenaere to present information related to Task Force initiatives supported by the Louisiana Department of Education. Ms. Bellue stated that the initiatives to address teacher recruitment and retention included the para-to-teacher model, pre-educator pathway, Aspiring Principal Fellowship, and Recruitment and Retention Fellowship. She added that the para-to-teacher model has seen significant enrollment growth, with school professionals such as paras and secretaries pursuing undergraduate degrees and teacher preparation through Reach University.

Ms. Bellue stated that between January 2024 and September 2024 597 new Louisiana school system employees enrolled in the para-to-teacher model, with over 1,100 individuals expected to participate in the program. She noted that the first para-to-teacher cohort will graduate in Spring 2025. This model has proven attractive to existing school system professionals, and LDOE is working closely with Reach to ensure proper preparation and support. Ms. Bellue noted that the approved teacher preparation pathway is the four-year model. Some school systems fund a portion of the tuition while the candidates cover the rest, though

many candidates bear the full cost themselves. Reach University, like other preparation providers, is subject to the teacher preparation quality rating system.

Dr. DeMeulenaere stated that the pre-educator pathway, which allows high school students to take courses towards becoming teachers, has seen significant growth, expanding from 70 schools in the 2022-2023 school year to 89 schools and 1,724 students enrolled. Notably, 52% of these students are students of color, meeting the program's diversity goal. Some students are also earning dual enrollment credits that can transfer to higher education institutions.

Dr. Joffrion then stated that LDOE, anticipating the loss of 8G funding, created an open-source pre-educator pathway curriculum, offering two free courses for participants. Additionally, LDOE organized a week-long professional development and summer camp experience, held at rotating universities like LSU A&M, for high school students in the pathway. The program involves university professors, education students, and experienced teachers, offering a mix of teaching, learning, and fun activities like swimming and bowling. This initiative, previously funded by 8G funding, provides students with valuable teaching exposure and a supportive, inspiring environment.

Dr. DeMeulenaere reported that dual enrollment has grown significantly, with 41,000 students now enrolled, including 1,100 African American students. Participation from 2020 to 2021 had nearly doubled and Dr. DeMeulenaere expressed confidence that this growth will continue. She recounted previous interactions with students, faculty, and administration related to dual enrollment programs, with each describing it as a meaningful experience.

Dr. Joffrion stated that LDOE's initiatives to recruit, retain, and support educators included two fellowships. First was the Aspiring Principal Fellowship, which helps individuals aspiring to become school leaders, such as assistant principals and master teachers. Participants

visit successful schools, learn from leadership experts, and receive coaching from a retired principal. The program has seen high demand, with many applicants vying for limited spots. The second is the Recruitment and Retention Fellowship, which supports human relations specialists and supervisors in school systems, helping them recruit and support teachers. It focuses on addressing the needs of new teachers, emphasizing personal investment and professional growth. The program has served 74 participants across five cohorts, with 22 in the current cohort. He noted that both initiatives aim to strengthen leadership and support systems within schools to enhance teacher retention and development.

Dr. Reed asked for additional information on the Principal Fellowship and the path followed by fellowship recipients. Dr. Joffrion stated that, traditionally, most aspiring principals prefer elementary schools, but the program exposes them to various school levels. Those with strong pedagogical knowledge in elementary education are learning to refine teaching practices in high schools. Additionally, many aspiring principal fellows are using portfolios created during the fellowship as a key asset in securing principal positions, with positive outcomes.

Dr. Joffrion then stated that to increase the number of certified teachers LDOE used monies to support teachers teaching outside their field (OFAT) by covering the costs of Praxis exams and certification fees through OFAT Praxis Vouchers. Over 77 teachers were supported, with \$20,000 spent on the initiative. Although the funding has ended, this program successfully increased certification rates, enabling teachers to teach within their certification. Currently 88% of teachers in traditional public schools, including those on practitioner licenses, are teaching within their certification area.

Mr. Steck added that the policy decisions made by lawmakers can significantly impact teacher certification rates. For example, in Texas, 52% of new hires were uncertified due to

recent legislative changes. In contrast, Louisiana's 12% uncertified rate is a success, but as shortages persist, particularly in specialized areas, maintaining certification standards will become increasingly difficult to reverse if changed.

Dr. Joffrion noted that teacher shortages are most prevalent in specialized areas like math, media specialties, and librarians. However, recent reports indicate that world languages and ESL are now critical shortage areas due to the growing population of English learners in schools. Interestingly, shortages in science and special education have decreased.

Dr. Paula Calderon added that the legislature recently required computer science certification, and Southeastern received a \$1.7 million contract to help teachers teaching out of field in computer science pass the Praxis exam and add the certification to their credentials. Following this, a \$500,000 contract was awarded to continue the effort, with part of the funds used to purchase Praxis vouchers for teachers of computer science with years of experience but no certification.

Dr. Joffrion stated that LDOE reported a 2% decrease in teacher exits, with an upward trend in completions of teacher preparation programs. LDOE is working closely with preparation providers to ensure graduates are better prepared, with funding for high-quality instructional materials and in-service support. The agency also launched a marketing campaign to promote education careers and partnered with Southeastern and Tangipahoa for the state's first teacher apprenticeship program, set to begin in the spring with five apprentices.

Dr. Calderon noted that for these pathways to be successful the focus should be on strategic staffing, in which districts use a para or substitute salary to pay residents a living wage as they are working as assistants in mentor teachers' classrooms. This model provides financial support during their residency, making it more sustainable than just a small graduation incentive.

She added that, while this initiative has started small, the idea is to eventually expand, allowing students to work in schools earlier in their education. This approach should keep class sizes manageable by placing two adults in the classroom, ensuring lower student-to-teacher ratios.

Dr. Joffrion added that LDOE has pushed the Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) to include educators in workforce grants, similar to their practice with fields like welding and engineering. With data showing a shortage of educators, LDOE is advocating for funding to expand the residency model statewide. He then stated that Louisiana has received a non-renewable, multi-million-dollar, multi-year grant to expand teacher apprenticeships, a first for the state. He added that a marketing toolkit was provided to school systems to promote the teaching profession and highlight salary increases. The state is also focusing on improving mentorship for teacher residents, especially in rural and high-poverty areas, where mentor teachers are often scarce. A new map will help track resident placements and ensure mentorship is targeted to the highest-need schools.

Dr. Joffrion stated that the Recruitment and Retention Fellowship set a goal of 80% school system representation and ended up having 87% of school systems participating in 2022-2023. Data on retention rates for the 2023-2024 school year will be released in March. He added that the goal for the Aspiring Principal Fellowship was for 33% of participants to move into leadership roles and 90% of cohort one fellows have done so, with 88% of cohort two also in leadership positions. Plans for expanding the program include a novice principal academy. He also noted that, for apprenticeships, various models are being considered, including increasing financial support for residents. Currently, residents receive a \$3,000 stipend for the year, but future models may include covering tuition, books, and fees. Additionally, school systems may hire residents as paraprofessionals, providing them with a living wage plus the \$3,000 stipend,

with an agreement for the resident to stay in the system for several years. This approach helps recruit and retain talent by offering competitive compensation. The goal is to incentivize passionate individuals to enter the teaching profession and stay long-term.

Dr. Reed stated it is crucial to create affordable and supportive paths for teacher residents, as unpaid residencies can be a barrier for many. It is important to ensure these individuals, who are committed to becoming great teachers, are not forced into financial hardship. Student teaching is a full-time commitment, and practical solutions are needed to help them succeed and enter the classroom.

Dr. Reed recounted how she had been invited to Northside High School in Lafayette to honor Ms. Frances Shaw, a 50-year chemistry teacher who returned to teaching after retiring due to the teacher shortage. Throughout her long career, Ms. Shaw has inspired many, particularly in STEM, by exposing students to professionals early on. She will share her story at the Teacher Leader Future Educator Honor Roll program. The *Advocate* will feature the story, and it will air nationally in January on the CBS Morning Show.

Dr. Joffrion discussed several initiatives implemented to improve teacher retention, including Dr. Brumley's work with the Let Teachers Teach Task Force. This has led to policy changes, such as limiting student cell phone use to reduce discipline issues and promote engagement in schools. Additionally, the new observation system focuses on internalizing lessons rather than outdated planning, helping teachers better prepare for student challenges. Other recommendations from the Let Teachers Teach Task Force include paying teachers for additional non-academic work, eliminating mandates to read verbatim from manuals, and trusting teachers instead of blaming them.

Dr. Joffrion added that the New Teacher Experience Program is key to teacher retention,

providing support through motivational summer sessions and year-round groups for teachers to discuss challenges and collaborate. In the 2023-2024 school year, 291 teachers are participating, with face-to-face meetings in Port Allen and Monroe. Topics of discussion include mentoring, guidance documents, direct teacher support, and professional learning modules. The New Teacher of the Year is also recognized annually and serves as a voice for teachers in various state committees. This year, Tiffany Pfeiffer was honored as the New Teacher of the Year.

Dr. Joffrion added that in fall 2023 340 education leaders participated in a LEAN Initiative to streamline expectations and reduce unnecessary tasks for teachers. He stated that LDOE also worked with Upbeat, focusing on school climate and morale, with 2,706 teachers involved and a 72% completion rate. He stated that 95% of participating principals reported gaining valuable insights on improving teacher morale. A collaboration with the national nonprofit the Urban Schools Human Capital Academy (USHCA) was used to create a Louisiana-specific handbook for human capital retention and recruitment, which will be released soon. He indicated that LDOE is looking at ways for these initiatives to become self-sustaining, with school systems funding certain programs. For example, LDOE purchased extra seats for the new teacher experience and secured membership with USHCA for several years to maintain these initiatives. However, due to budget constraints, LDOE must focus on the most impactful work rather than spreading resources too thin.

Dr. Reed said that after seeing the return on investment and the initiatives created, legislators will want to know how to sustain these efforts and plan for future funding strategies. She added that the Task Force's Annual Report is impressive as it shows both establishment of clear goals and the Task Force exceeding them. A discussion was held over the sunset of the Task Force in June of 2025. It was noted by many Task Force members that the work would

continue regardless of a legislative sunset.

Mr. Steck noted that regarding apprenticeships, it is worth considering federal funding opportunities as a continuing resolution released last night includes \$120 million in additional federal dollars for workforce training, potentially flowing through the Department of Labor to states and communities. He suggested that it could be beneficial to explore collaboration among agencies, including the Louisiana Workforce Commission, which oversees federal workforce dollars, especially Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act funds. Texas has a tri-agency Task Force focused on teacher workforce training, which could serve as a model for Louisiana. Dr. Reed suggested the LWC be involved in submitting a collective grant proposal for this money. Discussion of the procurement of future monies continued with a suggestion from Dr. Reed to create a one-page information sheet with all financial aspects of these initiatives for the legislators, to help with their decision making.

Mr. Erwin noted that the upcoming budget year may be problematic, but there are expectations of potential growth in tax revenue in future years. He suggested that it is important to lay the groundwork now, as long-term projections suggest less financial strain, unless actions are taken that could worsen the situation.

Mr. Steck noted that the national landscape of apprenticeship programs is growing rapidly, with 46 states, including Louisiana, now exploring or implementing registered apprenticeships for teachers. Texas, which is two years into its apprenticeship pathway, is seeing promising results, particularly in offering a paid route to certification and addressing workforce shortages. Louisiana is launching its own program, drawing insights from Texas' experiences. Mr. Steck noted the research indicates that apprenticeships can be an effective tool for economic mobility, helping aspiring teachers gain certification without sacrificing employment. While data

are limited, particularly from the U.S. Department of Labor, the expansion of these programs since 2022 shows significant potential for teacher workforce development across the country. Mr. Steck noted that many believe the issue is not of teacher shortage, but rather the mismatch between supply and demand. For instance, there is an overproduction of middle grade history teachers, while high-need areas like world languages and multilingual certifications remain underfilled. Addressing this mismatch could alleviate the perceived shortage, though it is highly variable among local communities. Task Force discussion continued regarding shortage areas in the state.

Mr. Erwin said it has been remarkable to see the shift from initial negative data to a more positive, coordinated effort. He added that legislative support has played a significant role, with the legislature not only passing measures but also actively participating in the issue. The key now is to sustain the momentum built without letting progress slip backward. The Task Force discussed the plan to expand, giving districts flexibility to access funding through various scenarios. Dr. Joffrion indicated that Round Three of the State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula (SAEF3), due May 1, is a key opportunity, and an early March meeting with LWC could provide valuable insights from other states. Although concerns were raised related to funding, there has been confirmation that the SAEF3 grant funding remains, with additional new grants potentially available.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, Mr. Erwin asked for a motion to adjourn. A quorum was not established, so the meeting was adjourned upon the unanimous consent of the members

in attendance.

ADDITIONAL GUESTS

Patrick Steck, Deans for Impact
Doreen Brasseaux, Sequitur
Christy Bellue, Louisiana Department of Education

Board of Regents Staff:

Michelle DeMeulenaere
Cara Landry
Melanie Sandahl
Susannah Craig
Melissa Anders