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# LEADING CHANGE IN LOUISIANA:

*How Louisiana Is Empowering  
Teachers to Implement an Aligned  
Academic Vision*

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2020

# LEADING CHANGE IN LOUISIANA

## How Louisiana Is Empowering Teachers to Implement an Aligned Academic Vision

A multitude of federal education laws over the last 20 years have resulted in states and school systems across the country making sweeping changes to standards, assessments, accountability, and talent systems to improve student outcomes. All too often, these efforts fall short of success because they operate in isolation of one another and do not directly impact the quality of instruction and learning happening in classrooms.

Research<sup>1</sup> shows that **teachers are most effective when they have access to a high-quality curriculum, ongoing professional development that helps them use that curriculum well, and student data from standards-aligned assessments.** This coherent academic vision of aligned curriculum, assessments, and professional learning is focused on providing every educator with the tools and resources to meet the needs of all students.



For these efforts to be successful and truly impact student learning, it is imperative that systems leaders seek input from and ensure teachers are invested in state, systems, and school-level policies and initiatives. When teachers have a voice in the academic decisions of their district or school, they are more likely to execute those with fidelity so that students master the skills they need to be successful in college or a career. Furthermore, providing teachers with leadership opportunities and decision-making power can ultimately reduce the likelihood that they leave their school systems or the profession.

[1] Kane, T. J., Owens, A. M., Marinell, W. H., Thal, D. R. C., & Staiger, D. O. (2016, February). *Teaching Higher: Educators' Perspectives on Common Core Implementation*. Harvard University Center for Education Policy Research. <http://cepr.harvard.edu/files/cepr/files/teaching-higher-report.pdf>

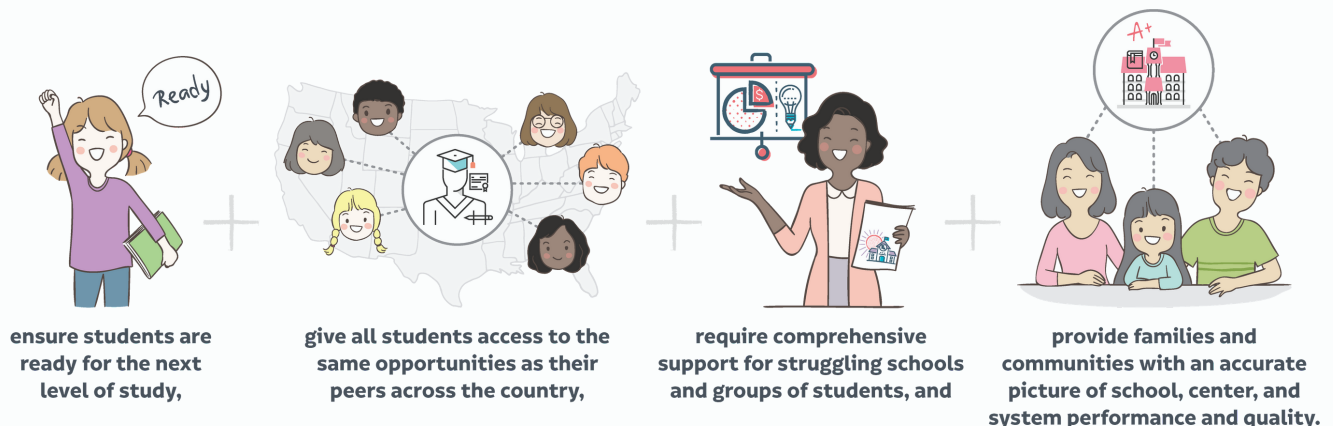
# LOUISIANA BELIEVES

State Superintendent John White, a member of the Chiefs for Change Board of Directors, and the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) launched Louisiana Believes, a comprehensive, multi-year, strategic plan to improve teacher practice and student learning in the Bayou State. **Louisiana Believes is built on the premise that Louisiana students are just as capable as any students in America, and that those closest to children – teachers – are best positioned to help students achieve those expectations.**

Because of these beliefs, Louisiana educators are committed to ensuring that every child and school can grow and thrive through five priority areas of work:

- 1 **Access to Quality Early Childhood Education:** Louisiana is committed to providing all children with access to high-quality early childhood programs that prepare them to learn, grow, and succeed.
- 2 **Academic Alignment in Every School and Classroom:** Louisiana has created the nation's most coherent statewide system of standards, curricula, assessments, and professional learning.
- 3 **Teacher and Leader Preparation:** All educators in Louisiana, from aspiring teachers to school system leaders, have access to high-quality training and opportunities for career advancement.
- 4 **Pathways to College or a Career:** Students in Louisiana graduate with the credentials and funding needed for their next step of education or career preparation.
- 5 **Targeted Support for Struggling Schools and Students:** As part of its plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act, Louisiana identifies and provides comprehensive support and funding to schools and students who persistently struggle.

**Louisiana Believes is also grounded in a set of goals. By 2025, the state's education system will:**



# ACADEMIC ALIGNMENT IN EVERY SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM

As the state with the highest student poverty rate in the country, and one that all too often falls to the bottom of the list for student proficiency, Louisiana's 2025 goals are ambitious. To attain them, the LDOE recognized that it must create a [coherent academic vision](#) that provides teachers with high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials and ongoing professional learning that helps them use those materials effectively.

In 2013, the state, in partnership with Louisiana educators, began reviewing and rating instructional materials for standards alignment so that it would be easier for schools and school systems to make good curricular decisions. To date, the LDOE has reviewed and made public the ratings of more than 200 sets of instructional materials<sup>2</sup> with over 50 curricula deemed “Tier 1,” or fully aligned to the Louisiana Student Standards. These materials are considered the gold standard by schools and school systems, and more than 80 percent have made them their curriculum of choice. This widespread adoption of high-quality instructional materials is a validation of not only the quality of the LDOE's review process, but the individuals conducting those reviews: Louisiana teachers.

Though most school systems across Louisiana have made great strides in increasing the quality of instructional materials used in classrooms, very few teachers report having access to high-quality, ongoing professional development that helps them navigate and apply their curriculum effectively. Therefore, Louisiana initiated a professional learning strategy that would place teachers in the driver's seat for training and supporting their peers on how to use standards-aligned curricular materials, and that gave them a voice in the:

- ➔ **development and implementation of academic standards;**
- ➔ **identification and adoption of high-quality instructional materials and assessments; and**
- ➔ **execution of job-embedded professional learning and coaching.**



[2] Louisiana Department of Education, *Instructional Materials Reviews*. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/academics/Online-Instructional-Materials-Reviews>

# TEACHER LEADERS:

## Developing and Implementing Louisiana Student Standards

In the spring of 2013, the LDOE launched the [Louisiana Teacher Leaders](#) program to better support teachers in using the state's academic standards to ensure that students are mastering the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in the next grade level. This group of outstanding educators was born out of three core beliefs:

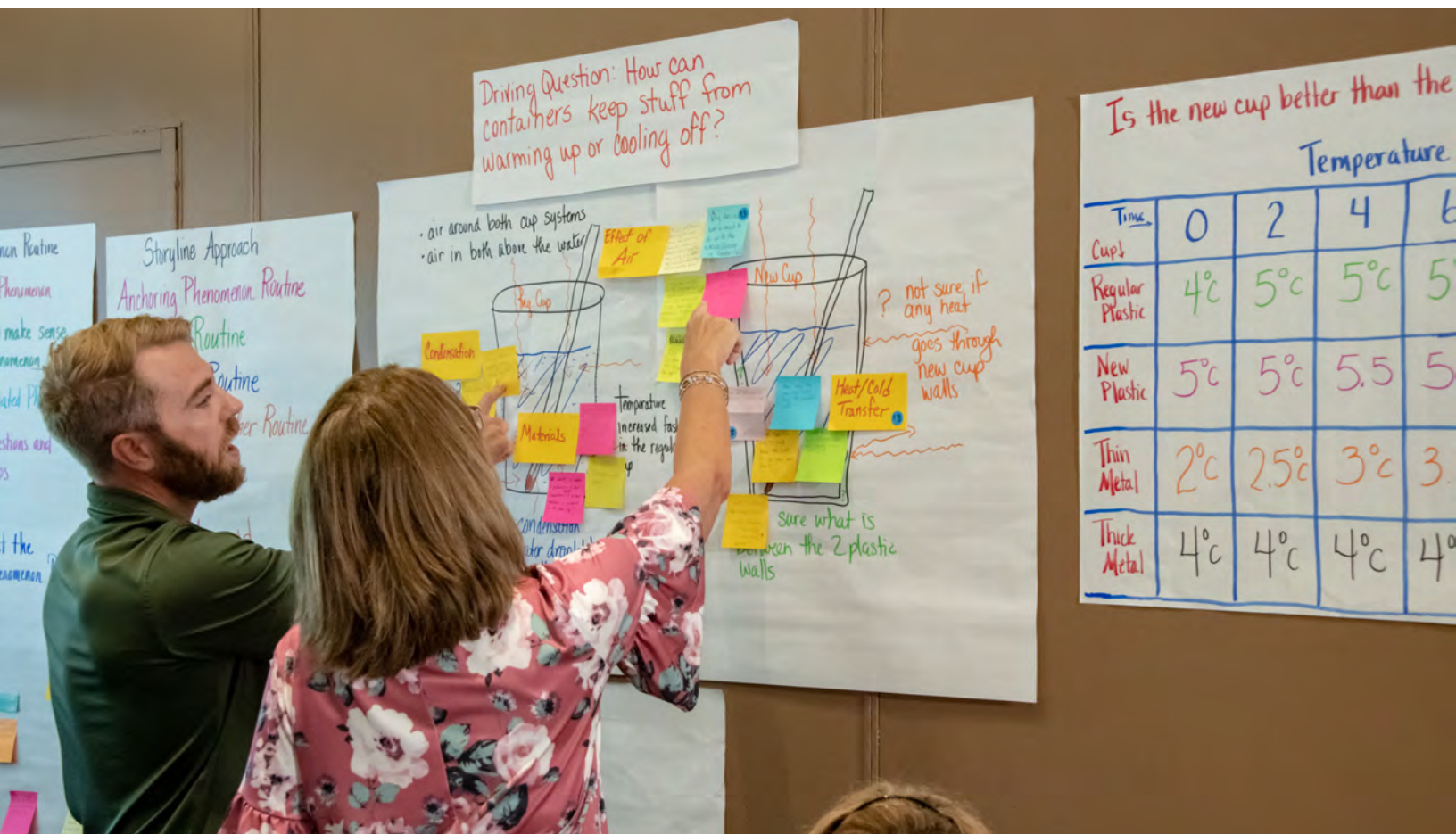
- ➔ **Those closest to students are best positioned to make instructional decisions.**
- ➔ **The state has a role in providing resources and training directly to teachers.**
- ➔ **Teachers play a powerful role in training fellow teachers.**

In its initial cohort, the LDOE brought together 2,000 Teacher Leaders, approximately one from every school in the state, for ongoing collaboration and professional learning with the goal of:

- ➔ **helping teachers improve their classroom instruction by providing them with high-quality tools and resources;**
- ➔ **fostering widespread use of these tools and sharing of best practices with other teachers in their school/district; and**
- ➔ **recognizing and elevating the voice of Louisiana's most talented and dedicated educators.**

Over the last seven years, Louisiana's nearly 6,000 Teacher Leaders have played an integral part in defining what quality instruction, planning, and professional learning looks like. They have led the state's efforts to help teachers plan for and deliver high-quality, standards-aligned instruction to students.





## TEACHER LEADER ADVISORS: Identifying High-Quality Instructional Materials and Assessments

During the early days of the Teacher Leaders program, the LDOE began consulting with a smaller group of exceptional educators within the cohort on academic issues. Soon it became evident to the department that it should do more to draw on these educators' leadership and expertise, leading to the creation of a [Teacher Leader Advisors](#) (TLA) group. TLAs are hired by the LDOE to review and develop the next wave of high-quality instructional materials and training tools to be used by thousands of teachers across the state and provide feedback to the LDOE on key academic initiatives. Over the last four years, TLAs have had a significant impact on:

- ➔ [instructional material reviews](#);
- ➔ [the development of ELA Guidebooks](#);
- ➔ [the development of LEAP 360 assessments](#); and
- ➔ [sessions at the Teacher Leader Summit](#).

As the number of Teacher Leaders and TLAs increased, the LDOE has continued to expand the tools and professional development opportunities available to educators. With the increased use of high-quality instructional materials statewide, the LDOE also began to see the need for additional support at the local level for novice and veteran teachers.

# MENTOR TEACHERS AND CONTENT LEADERS:

## Executing Job-Embedded Professional Learning and Coaching

### MENTOR TEACHERS

During the initial implementation of [Believe and Prepare](#), Louisiana's educator preparation initiative, Teacher Leaders were informally mentoring aspiring teachers who were undergoing their student teaching experience as part of their educator preparation program. Louisiana codified the role of Mentor Teachers by requiring that all aspiring teachers complete a year-long residency under the tutelage of a mentor teacher in order to obtain their teaching credentials. [Mentor Teachers](#) provide these residents and other new teachers with ongoing coaching and support to be more prepared for their first years of teaching.

To recognize the efforts of Mentor Teachers in growing the next generation of teachers in Louisiana, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) [approved regulations](#) in 2018 to establish a Mentor Teacher ancillary certificate and training that contributes to a school leader licensure starting in 2020. The training mentors receive is content-specific and oriented around high-quality curricula so that mentors acquire a deep knowledge of the Louisiana standards, aligned high-quality curriculum, and aligned pedagogical approaches. To date, more than 1,700 Mentor Teachers have completed the training. Nearly 80 have completed the assessments and are eligible for the new certificate.

### CONTENT LEADERS

In the quest to ensure all teachers receive ongoing, curriculum-aligned professional learning and support, the LDOE established the [Content Leaders](#) program in 2017. It builds on the success of the state's Teacher Leaders program and is designed to:

- ➔ **grow local leadership pipelines for schools and school systems by developing talented teachers within the system; and**
- ➔ **equip a cadre of talented educators with the knowledge and skills to coach and support other teachers within their schools and school systems.**

Participants in the program undergo a year-long series of nine trainings that focus on developing deep content knowledge and pedagogy in English Language Arts (ELA) and math; the knowledge and skills needed to help others use ELA and math curriculum well; and the skills needed to facilitate high-quality learning experiences for fellow educators. As with Mentor Teachers, this training culminates in a Content Leader ancillary certificate that was approved by the BESE in 2018 that can be used towards a school leader licensure. To date, more than 2,000<sup>4</sup> Content Leaders have completed the training.

[3] Louisiana Department of Education, Office of Talent, 2019

[4] Louisiana Department of Education, Office of Talent, 2019

# LOUISIANA'S LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

The addition of Mentor Teachers and Content Leaders ensures that those high-performing teachers who aspire to take on a greater leadership role within their school or district are able to do so, while allowing them to build the skills and capacity of their fellow teachers who choose to stay in the classroom. To date, nearly 9,000<sup>5</sup> teachers have decided to pursue a leadership role in their school as a Teacher Leader, TLA, Mentor Teacher, or Content Leader.



Source: Louisiana Department of Education

This talent pipeline from classroom teacher to district superintendent is helping to:

- ➔ raise student achievement statewide;
- ➔ define what quality instruction looks like;
- ➔ increase teacher quality; and
- ➔ reduce teacher attrition.

In addition to empowering teachers at the local level to become instructional leaders in their schools and school systems, Louisiana has taken other deliberate steps to provide teachers with direct support and training.



# TEACHER LEADER SUMMIT

Originally launched with the first cohort of 2,000 Teacher Leaders in the spring of 2013, the [Teacher Leader Summit](#) has become Louisiana's marquee professional learning event, and arguably one of the largest professional development opportunities for teachers in the country. Held each summer in New Orleans, the summit is the primary source of direct communication and training to teachers on standards, curriculum, and assessments. The three-day event now provides more than 6,500 educators with the opportunity to share their knowledge with fellow educators, learn new skills, and prepare for the upcoming school year.

Both Teacher Leaders and TLAs host sessions at the summit and deliver the training they receive as participants to their colleagues in their schools and districts.

## 2019 TEACHER LEADER SUMMIT

### THEME:

**Every Child, Every Day**

### KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

**Tim Shanahan  
Dan Goldhaber  
Natalie Wexler  
Kristie Kaurez  
Rich Milner  
Mandy Manning**

### PARTICIPANTS:

**6,500**

### SESSIONS OFFERED:

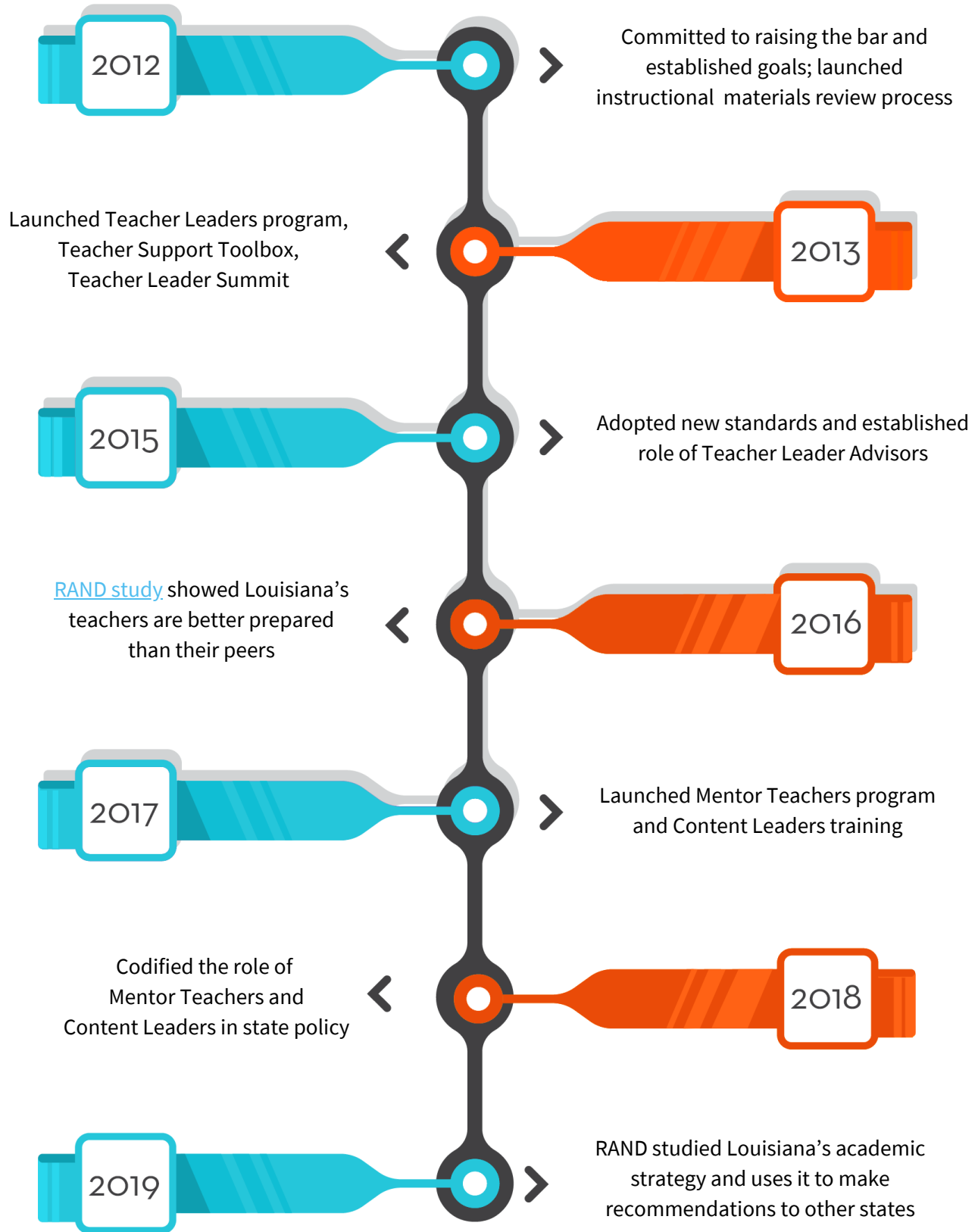
**300**

### TOTAL HOURS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:

**18.5**



# THE IMPACT OF A TEACHER-LED ACADEMIC VISION



# STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT RESULTS

While Louisiana Believes was intended to be a marathon, not a sprint, early indicators show the plan is working. The adoption of “Tier 1” curricula, coupled with aligned assessments and professional development, have resulted in a [steady increase in student achievement](#)<sup>6</sup> in grades 3 through 12.

- ➔ Since implementing new standards-aligned assessments in 2015, **the percentage of students showing “mastery” has improved seven points in ELA and five points in math**, indicating that more students are fully prepared for the next grade level.
- ➔ Louisiana **leads the nation for improvement on the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress in eighth-grade math and is second for eighth-grade reading growth**. Louisiana’s pace of improvement since 2009 in all subjects significantly exceeds national trends.
- ➔ **More students graduated in 2018 than ever before**, with a graduation rate of 81.4 percent. This represents an increase of more than 5,000 students over 2012, far exceeding the nation’s growth.
- ➔ **More students enrolled in college in 2018 than ever before**, with more than 25,000 pursuing a postsecondary education. This is an increase of more than 5,000 first-time freshmen since 2012.



Additionally, numerous state departments of education, national education advocacy groups, and reporters have visited Louisiana over the past four years to observe how educators are leveraging curriculum to significantly impact student learning.

***“As a state, we are seeing increases in student performance in every measure both locally and nationally. These successes are a direct result of a coherent academic strategy centered around increasing access to quality early childhood education; academic alignment of standards, curricula, assessments, and professional development in every classroom; quality preparation and advancement opportunities for teachers and leaders; and clear pathways to college and career for every graduate.”***

Jessica Baghian, Assistant Superintendent, Louisiana Department of Education  
and a member of Chiefs for Change Future Chiefs program



## TEACHER ACHIEVEMENT RESULTS:

[In a 2016 study](#), researchers at the RAND Corporation observed Common Core implementation at the state level using data from the organization’s American Teacher Panel, a standing nationwide sample of about 2,700 teachers. During the study, researchers noticed “large and intriguing differences” between Louisiana teachers and those in other states. Louisiana’s educators were far more likely to be using instructional materials aligned to Common Core standards. They also demonstrated a better understanding of the standards and taught their students in ways the standards were meant to encourage<sup>7</sup>.

***“We saw consistently higher results in Louisiana. There were occasional high points in other states, but we kept seeing this difference between Louisiana [teachers] and other teachers, which is why we decided to write the report.***

***We just thought there was a story there.”***

***Julia Kaufman, RAND policy researcher***

This success can be attributed, in part, to Louisiana’s relentless focus on providing teachers with direct professional learning aligned to the Louisiana Student Standards, curriculum, and assessments, a task that was primarily carried out by Teacher Leaders, TLAs, Content Leaders, and Mentor Teachers across the state. Educators’ involvement in these initiatives not only strengthens their role as instructional leaders, data suggest that it also strengthens their instructional practice. For example, the percentage of teachers who completed Mentor Teacher training and were rated as “Highly Effective” on the state’s value-added model in 2019 was double that of teachers who did not complete the training.

Anecdotal data<sup>8</sup> in Louisiana also suggests districts’ investment in teacher leadership may be connected to the following outcomes:

- ➔ **developing a stronger pipeline for school system leadership positions;**
- ➔ **improving teacher retention; and**
- ➔ **increasing teacher satisfaction.**

[7] Opfer, V. Darleen, Julia H. Kaufman, and Lindsey E. Thompson, *Implementation of K–12 State Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts and Literacy: Findings from the American Teacher Panel*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1529-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1529-1.html)

[8] Louisiana Department of Education, *Office of Talent*, 2019

## A CLOSER LOOK: NOLA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Since 2015, Superintendent of NOLA Public Schools and Chiefs for Change member Dr. Henderson Lewis, Jr. has been working to ensure that all students in his care receive a high-quality education that prepares them for civic, social, and economic success. This vision is beginning to play out as more and more students across the district are leaving high school prepared for college or a career. Since the 2015-2016 school year, the district's graduation rate has grown 6 percent from 72 percent to 78 percent at the end of the 2018-2019 school year<sup>9</sup>.

Superintendent Lewis attributes this success to the district's teachers and leaders. He also recognizes that in order to continue to have success in executing the district's academic vision, he must have effective teachers and school leaders in every school and classroom. "The leadership pipeline established by the department allows our district to develop a talent continuum for local educators to receive professional development and career advancement within our system," said Lewis. "This professional learning not only helps individual teachers to hone their craft, it creates opportunities for our most talented educators to gain the knowledge, skills, and coaching experience needed to support other teachers within their school building."

Having an academic vision directly tied to long-term economic success for students also means that teachers in NOLA Public Schools must be prepared to provide students the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in college or a career. Specifically, students need to master the state's content standards as measured by performance on the ACT and Advanced Placement exams, attainment of industry-based credentials, and increases in graduation rates and college enrollment. "Our Teacher Leaders, Content Leaders, and Mentor Teachers are becoming experts in standards-aligned instruction," said Lewis.

***"Teachers who know how to utilize standards-aligned curriculum and assessments can best help students to be prepared for postsecondary success."***

Dr. Henderson Lewis, Jr., Superintendent of NOLA Public Schools and Chiefs for Change member



[9] Louisiana Department of Education (May 2019). 2005-2018 Louisiana State and School System Cohort Graduation Rates.

[https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/data-management/2005-2018-state-school-system-cohort-graduation-and-credential-rate-summary.xlsx?sfvrsn=9e5b9ff\\_4](https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/data-management/2005-2018-state-school-system-cohort-graduation-and-credential-rate-summary.xlsx?sfvrsn=9e5b9ff_4)

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATES

While there is still work to do to put Louisiana schools on par with their counterparts across the country, the initial results of the state's decision to leverage the expertise of teachers as a core component of its academic strategy is showing promise. States and school systems interested in implementing a similar approach should:

1

## **Engage Teachers to Create and Execute a Unified Vision of Quality:**

States should involve teachers in the process of creating and executing a coherent academic vision of aligned standards, curriculum, and assessments to communicate a high bar for what is expected from schools and students and what constitutes high-quality instruction.

2

## **Invest in Structures to Support Teacher Leaders:**

Teacher effectiveness depends on states' and districts' willingness to create the structures that give teacher leaders opportunities to support their peers. These include, for example, school schedules that prioritize planning and collaboration time and the presence of on-site experts like Content Leaders and Mentor Teachers.

3

## **Create a Meaningful Leadership Pipeline:**

States should not overlook the desire that teachers have to develop and advance throughout their careers. Strong leadership pipelines allow teachers to learn and grow while remaining in the classroom and are a sound investment in school systems' educator workforce.

