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Workforce Investment Council

Louisiana Workforce Investment Council

Position Statement
for the
Louisiana Postsecondary Education Review Commission

November 16, 2009

The Louisiana Workforce Investment Council is a 41-member body created by the Louisiana Legislature through Act 743 in the spring of 2008. This Act provides the authority and direction necessary to implement a major reorganization of Louisiana's workforce development efforts.

The focus of this legislation is creating a proper alignment of our educational and other workforce development resources with Louisiana's workforce needs. The goal is an efficient workforce development delivery system that produces the high-quality workforce that Louisiana needs – the jobs of today and tomorrow.

The Louisiana Workforce Investment Council is tasked by Act 743 to play a significant role in the resulting redesign. The Workforce Investment Council (WIC) will address the full range of workforce issues including:

- ***Understanding and clearly communicating the demand for specific workforce skills, knowledge, and expertise*** – to compete for today's high-quality jobs and the blue ocean opportunities of the future that Louisiana develops;
- ***Aligning all components of our education system with our workforce needs*** – from early childhood and Pre-K through high school to our technical and community colleges and our universities;
- ***Refining our workforce development resources and programs*** – such as our statewide network of regional Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), the state's Incumbent Worker Program, and our "Welfare-to-Work" programs; and
- ***Reinforcing workforce recruitment and retention best practices*** – making sure Louisiana can recruit and retain the workforce it needs.

The Council, as required by Act 743, is developing a comprehensive state plan, that establishes strategic goals, objectives, and measures that provide direction for the provision of services and coordination of resources by the state's workforce development delivery system. This plan will also establish benchmarks for each measure and provide recommended strategies for implementation by state agencies and private entities.

The plan will be submitted to the Governor for approval, and upon approval by the Governor, each agency shall submit an annual action plan to the Workforce Investment Council describing how it intends to implement its workforce development programs in accordance with the plan.

The Workforce Investment Council is developing this comprehensive state plan with three equally important strategic priorities in mind:

- ***Continuous Improvement of Our "Demand System"*** – maintaining a credible/robust system that identifies and communicates workforce demand and priority workforce development needs;

- **Better Alignment of Our “Supply System”** – providing a coordinated system of education and workforce training that responds to Louisiana’s identified workforce demands; and
- **Greater Engagement of Louisiana’s Business Community** – helping to assess and refine the state’s ongoing workforce development efforts. Many of the WIC members are working with the local WIBs to fill vacant positions with active business community members/leaders.

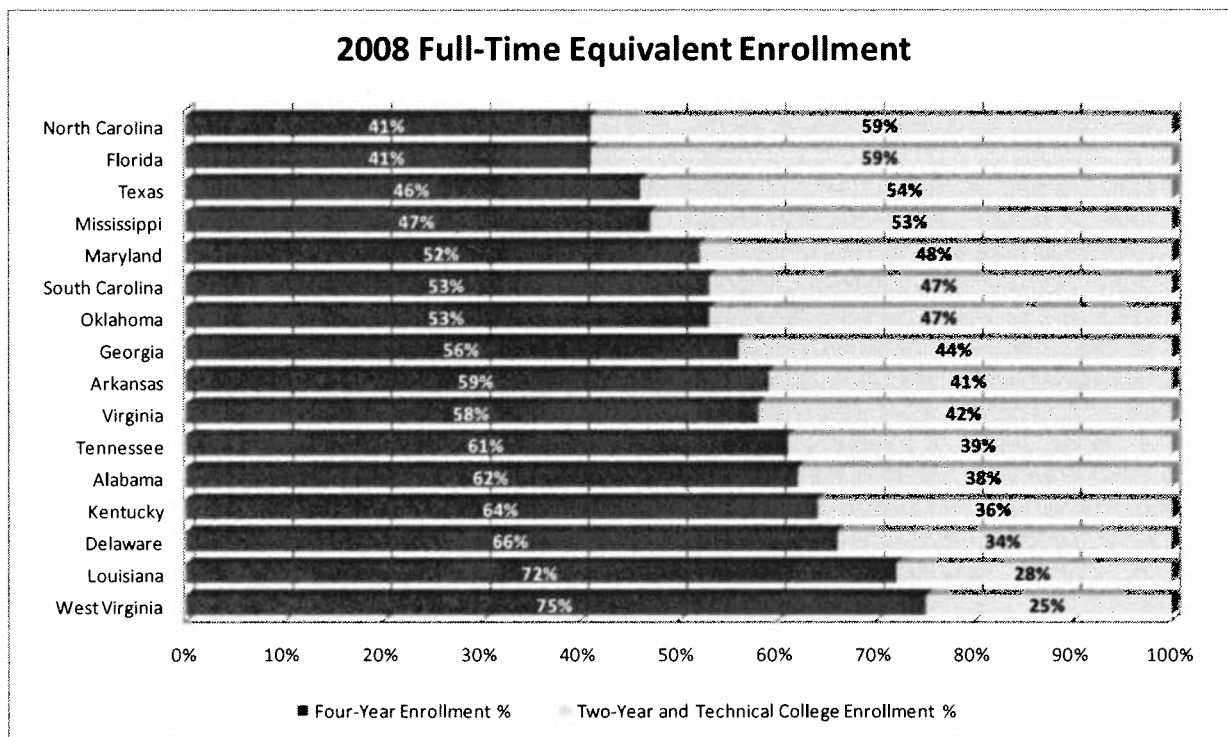
We are already making good progress on **Improving the Demand System**. In cooperation with the Occupational Forecasting Conference and the Louisiana Workforce Commission, we are developing new methods and processes to improve Louisiana’s occupational forecasts. We believe that this data will prove essential to our institutions of higher education as they perform gap analyses for the realignment of their curricula and degree programs to better match graduates with available jobs.

We are also making statewide progress toward **Greater Engagement of Louisiana’s Business Community** in the state’s workforce development efforts, evidenced by the work of many organizations to bring greater focus and attention to the performance of Louisiana’s workforce development system – including several statewide groups such as the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI), the Council for a Better Louisiana (CABL), and Blueprint Louisiana. Business community re-engagement is also evident by the support of regional economic development groups across the state, and the many organizations and associations represented on the Workforce Investment Council. The Act requires 21 of the 41 members appointed by the Governor to represent the business and industry sectors. These sectors are:

- Retail and wholesale sector
 - National Federation of Independent Business
- Energy sector
 - Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives
- Medical services and biotechnology sector
 - Louisiana Hospital Association
- Entertainment and tourism sector
 - Louisiana Restaurant Association
- Durable goods and manufacturing sector
 - Louisiana Chemical Industry Alliance
- Construction sector
 - Associated Builders and Contractors
- Agriculture and forestry sector
 - Louisiana Forestry Association
- Financial and insurance sector
 - Louisiana Banker’s Association
- Logistics and transportation sector
 - Louisiana Motor Transport Association
- Organized labor
 - Louisiana AFL-CIO
- Information technology sector
- General business community

We must continue to develop new and better ways to engage the business community in the ongoing refinement of our workforce development system.

We believe the most challenging strategic priority is in creating **Better Alignment of Our Supply System** with Louisiana’s identified workforce demands. There is a significant mismatch between the higher education system Louisiana has, and the system of higher education that Louisiana needs. Most glaring is the student enrollment imbalance between our community and technical colleges and our four-year universities. Ideally, the undergraduate enrollment split between technical/two-year schools and four-year schools should be somewhere in the 50-50 range. The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) data below clearly demonstrates how far Louisiana is from that mark.



Source: SREB State Data Exchange – Tables 44 and 49 (December 2008)

It is essential that we begin to correct this enrollment imbalance to better align our higher education resources with Louisiana’s workforce needs. Evidence from Louisiana’s Occupational Forecasting Conference indicates that the majority of Louisiana jobs require education beyond high school. Only about 30% require four-year degrees. Louisiana’s employment outlook is similar to that of leading states like Georgia, North Carolina, and Texas. However, only about 25% of Louisiana postsecondary enrollment is in community and technical colleges even though nearly 70% of jobs specifically require that level of education and training. In other words, Louisiana postsecondary enrollment is three to one in favor of our four-year schools, but employment (current and forecasted) is two to one in the opposite direction.

Every time Louisiana loses a significant business development project due to skilled labor deficits, we also lose the four-year graduate jobs that would have come with that project. Creating a system that produces more community and technical college graduates is one of the best things we can do to attract more good jobs for four-year graduates.

These numbers leave little doubt that our higher education resources are not properly aligned with our workforce needs – leading to three unfortunate outcomes. First, postsecondary education in Louisiana costs 15-20 percent more versus more balanced systems in other states. Second, because we enroll so many academically unprepared students in our four-year institutions, we have the lowest college graduation rates in the South. Third, we produce a consistent deficit of skilled labor.

We need significant change now – our higher education system must become more responsive to the state’s identified needs. The following are our strategic imperatives for better alignment of the state’s higher education resources.

- ***Creating Better Connections and Collaboration Between Our High Schools, Our Community and Technical Colleges, and Our Universities*** to make sure everyone in Louisiana is prepared for, and has access to at least one, two, or four years of postsecondary education. Also to enhance the quality and amount of career information and counseling provided to students at all education levels.
- ***Utilizing a Performance-based Funding Formula*** to reward success in all components of our higher education system. Success must include a measure of whether our students become employed in their chosen fields in Louisiana.
- ***Developing the Resources and Elevating the Status of Associate Degrees and Technical Certificates*** as a good pathway to high value jobs and to our four-year schools. Innovative methods to increase capacity for enrollment growth should be examined, including expansion of online courses/programs and facility/faculty sharing. Enrollment growth should be directed in areas that increase relevance to business and industry.
- ***Refocusing the Missions of Regional Universities*** to better serve the economic needs of its communities – by increasing admission standards (and reducing exceptions to those standards), improving completion rates, and eliminating duplication of programs. Greater collaboration among all postsecondary institutions in each region is essential.
- ***Supporting LSU to be Competitive with the Top Research Universities in the Nation*** in its ability to attract and retain talented faculty, students, and research funding and grants.
- ***Supporting Funding of Postsecondary Institutions*** to the level necessary to fulfill their mission while protecting opportunities for all students which may include, but is not limited to, providing tuition and fee raising flexibility for all higher education institutions – to spur a healthy competition between schools for our students, and to allow each school the opportunity to cover the costs of meeting their respective missions.

- ***Evaluating Postsecondary Governance for Redesign*** that would better support a comprehensive postsecondary education vision, a rationalized deployment of state resources, and a system of postsecondary education that is more responsive to Louisiana's needs.

None of these ideas are new – and none of these changes will come easily. Political self-interests and protection of local institutions often get in the way of doing what is best for the state as a whole. But these changes are necessary and vital to Louisiana's economic future. Our Legislature and Governor will need to show wisdom, courage, and resolve in implementing the recommendations of the WIC and the Postsecondary Education Review Commission or nothing will come of this opportunity to move our state in a critical positive direction.

The Workforce Investment Council applauds the mission of the Postsecondary Education Review Commission, and we encourage you to fully seize this historic opportunity. Cosmetic changes and half steps will do Louisiana no good. We urge you to be bold.