

Higher Education/ Workforce



**Build the
Talent Pool
in Louisiana**

Louisiana should reset the focus of postsecondary education with the specific goals of providing greater affordability for Louisiana students, equitably increasing the education attainment levels of its citizens and enhancing the competitiveness of its institutions.

There is one overarching issue facing Louisiana when it comes to postsecondary education – the imperative to raise the educational attainment of its citizens. There are many facets to this challenge and many other important things Louisiana’s colleges and universities need to provide. But if the state is serious about transforming education and addressing the issues necessary to rise from the bottom of so many negative lists, it must increase the level of education that citizens attain.

Not only is this about improving opportunities for Louisiana citizens, it is also about expanding the workforce and building a stronger and more prosperous state.

The Louisiana Board of Regents has embraced an attainment goal of having 60% of Louisiana’s working-age population with a quality postsecondary education credential by 2030. According to the national Lumina Foundation, Louisiana’s current attainment rate is 44.2%ⁱ. In 2017-18, Louisiana public colleges awarded more than 41,000 degrees, credentials or certificatesⁱⁱ. Reaching the 60% goal will require higher education institutions to more than double that total over the next decade.

Adding to that challenge is the fact that there is a significant gap between workforce needs and education attainment. A widely-recognized study by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce estimates that by 2020, 56% of the jobs in Louisiana will require some sort of postsecondary credential. Louisiana falls far short of having enough educated workers to fill that needⁱⁱⁱ.

Another concern is the sheer number of undereducated adults in the state. Currently, 1.4 million adults – more than half of the adult population – lack a postsecondary credential^{iv}. Nearly half of those adults live in poverty, they have higher rates of unemployment than others and their wages are lower.

Current Educational and Economic Indicators in Louisiana^v

LA Poverty Rate by Educational Attainment Level	% Of Population	Estimated Wages By Educational Attainment
Less than High School	32%	\$21,229
High School Graduate	17%	\$28,954
Some College/Associate Degree	13%	\$32,627
Bachelor's	5%	\$47,974
Graduate or Professional		\$59,981

Equity Gap in Attainment

There is also an equity gap. Half of adult African-Americans in Louisiana have only a high school degree or less. That compares with 34% of whites. Only 16% of African-Americans have a bachelor's degree or higher^{vi}.

The issues the state faces are clear: 1) Louisiana's level of education attainment is low, 2) the population lacks the education and training to meet workforce needs, 3) low education attainment perpetuates high levels of poverty and 4) African-Americans, both young and older, are disproportionately impacted by all of this.

Clearly, the way to address these issues is to get more people – particularly adults and African-Americans – into higher education. But there is a barrier to addressing this that cannot be ignored.

Funding Issues

During the great recession and the period when state revenues were falling, Louisiana made the policy decision to disinvest in higher education while allowing higher tuition and federal recovery dollars to make up most of the difference. Louisiana was not alone, as most states were forced to make cuts to their colleges and universities.

But as the recession ended, other states began to return resources to their schools. To a large degree, this was not the case in Louisiana. According to the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, only 13 states are still appropriating less to higher education today than in 2012. The net reduction in Louisiana is 13.8% – the second highest in the country^{vii}.

As a result of those cuts, access to the state's colleges and universities is now hindered by affordability because prices have risen significantly. From 2009 through 2017, state funding for higher education was cut by \$718 million. Over that same period tuition and fees rose by \$700 million^{viii}.

What that means is that over the last decade, the funding mechanism for Louisiana colleges and universities has been radically changed from being primarily state supported to primarily student supported. Over that same period, investment in Louisiana's TOPS scholarship program, which primarily benefits middle and higher-income families, has grown from about \$131 million to almost \$300 million^{ix}. In contrast, the state's needs-based GO Grants for economically disadvantaged students have remained virtually flat totaling only about \$28 million in 2018^x.

Access to Higher Education

If the goal is to increase educational attainment for all Louisiana citizens, especially for those who are the most economically disadvantaged and in greatest need of opportunities for education and training, the state must make postsecondary education more accessible. That will no doubt require some new investment in needs-based aid, but it will also require new and innovative approaches such as leveraging existing dollars more effectively and giving students opportunities for getting college credit, career training and work-based learning while still in high school.

Simply graduating more students from high school and enrolling them in college or training programs will not equip the state to achieve the Louisiana Board of Regents' 60% attainment goal. Success will require a concerted effort to reach adults who are currently working without a credential or not working at all and engage them in postsecondary education.

This is complicated by the high number of citizens who never completed high school. In Louisiana, that totals more than 330,000 working-age adults^{xi}. Typically, these individuals are not eligible for financial aid that could give them access to the training and job skills they need until they first earn a high school degree or some equivalency. As tuition has increased at institutions across the state, even adults in the workforce are finding it too expensive or difficult to enroll and are often ineligible for financial aid or do not know how to access it.

Innovative Approaches

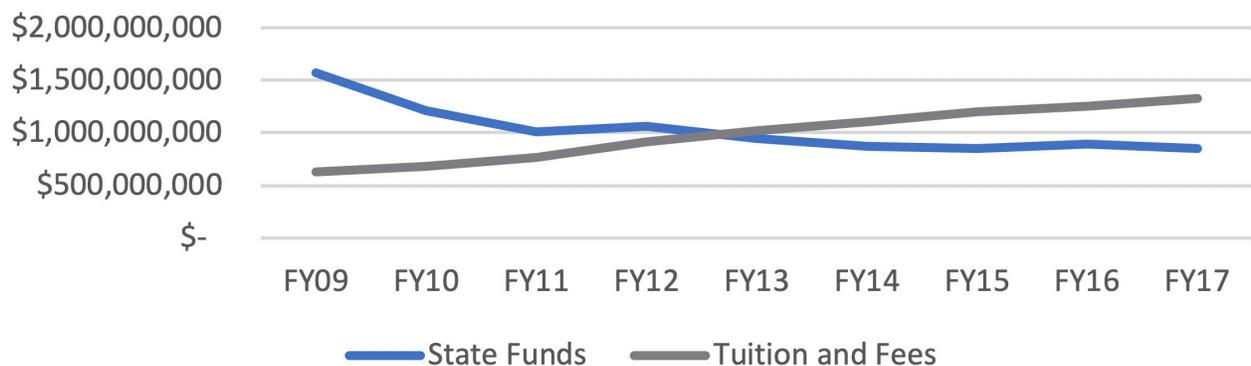
The Louisiana Community and Technical College System is currently exploring innovative options to provide some degree of financial aid for adults while also creating new pathways that are more flexible and take into account more complicated life situations.

One is a new kind of TOPS Tech program for adults who are currently not eligible for traditional programs. Under that plan, an adult student would have to demonstrate through an alternative form of standardized testing, a score equivalent to a 17 on the ACT, which is the same requirement to be eligible for traditional TOPS Tech. The student would then be able to use this award much like a traditional TOPS Tech award to cover tuition at technical and community colleges^{xii}.

Another idea that is being tested is one where community and technical colleges would recruit adult students through a program where they would enroll in a six-week course, earn a credential, be required to pass a drug test, and then be able to immediately start work on a 30-hour-per-week job. They would then use the other 10 hours of the work week to attend school for three months and earn a second credential that could lead to a higher paying job. The program is envisioned as a partnership with local businesses who would help subsidize the cost^{xiii}.

Utilizing resource mapping to inventory the funding sources currently available could also help students and families target specific outcomes and goals, enhancing financing for many of these programs. That would include packaging such things as federal PELL grants, SNAP or food stamp benefits, state needs-based funding from Go Grants, various child care assistance programs, and private-sector participation to remove as many obstacles as possible for citizens to further their education or training without new funding^{xiv}.

Louisiana Higher Education Budget Trends ^{xv}



Importantly, the state's four-year schools are also reaching out to adults. The University of Louisiana System has launched an initiative called *Compete LA* aimed at the 633,000 citizens in Louisiana who have some college credits, but no degree. The program offers 28 degree programs, many available online, designed to make it easier for working citizens to access higher education and earn a degree on a timeline that works for

them. The program also offers students access to coaches to assist them in navigating the system through completion^{xv}. The state's historically-black colleges are also undertaking efforts to bring working adults back into postsecondary education.

Building the Talent Pipeline

While workforce needs are important, it should also be noted that higher education in Louisiana is a critical incubator of research and innovation. Medical schools produce physicians and universities develop the talent that will fill the jobs of the future. Louisiana's economic mix of energy, manufacturing, agriculture and maritime has served the state well, but that landscape is changing as the technology sector continues to become more critical.

One of the key signs of a state's health is its population growth. Over the last few years Louisiana's population has not grown and, over the last two years, has gone down slightly^{xvi}. If Louisiana is to reverse that trend, it will need to modernize the state's economy and begin to attract more high-tech companies with high-quality jobs. It will not be able to do that without a homegrown, technology-savvy workforce. The only way the state can produce that is through a higher education system that has the resources to deliver the talent pool businesses demand.

The RESET

If Louisiana is going to meet the workforce needs of today, produce the talent to fill the high-tech jobs of the future and improve the socio-economic status of its citizens, it must increase the level of education attainment in the state. Louisiana cannot do that without a vibrant postsecondary education system.

- **Louisiana should commit to the Board of Regents goal of ensuring 60% of Louisiana's adult population has a high-value credential or degree by 2030.**
- **Louisiana should begin a targeted reinvestment in postsecondary education, tied to measurable goals, that improve the lives of citizens and help meet the workforce demands of today, as well as those of the future. It should start with a focus on affordable pathways for all students, balancing needs-based aid, merit awards, and financial assistance for adults.**
- **Louisiana should work toward measurable outcomes on short and long-term goals that include more high-value credentials, closing the equity gap, increasing the number of adults earning a credential, increasing income, lowering poverty levels and meeting workforce needs.**
- **Louisiana should undertake innovative approaches for leveraging existing resources to remove obstacles to raising Louisiana's overall education attainment.**

Endnotes

i Lumina Foundation: Stronger Nation Report; <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2019/#state/LA&s-tsid=byAttainment>

- ii Louisiana Board of Regents; State Wide Completers System; <https://apps.regents.state.la.us/Reports/Report.aspx?reportPath=/COMPLETER/CMLRCMP>
- iii Georgetown University Center on Education & the Workforce; Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020 (June 2013); <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/recovery-job-growth-and-education-requirements-through-2020/>
- iv Lumina Foundation: Stronger Nation Report; <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2019/#state/LA&s-tsid=byAttainment>
- v Data provided by the Louisiana Board of Regents
- vi Data provided by the Louisiana Board of Regents
- vii State Higher Education Executive Offices Association; State Higher Education Finance (FY 2017); <http://www.sheeo.org/projects/shef-%E2%80%94state-higher-education-finance>
- viii Data provided by the Louisiana Board of Regents
- ix Louisiana Board of Regents; TOPS Report: Analysis of the TOPS Program from 2008-2017 (October 2018); <https://regents.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/9b-TOPS-1202-2018-Final-DRAFT-Proposal-for-BOR.pdf>
- x Louisiana Office of Student Financial Aid; Student Financial Aid Bulletin (July 2018); <http://www.osfa.la.gov/MainSitePDFs/S2018-1.pdf>
- xi Lumina Foundation: Stronger Nation Report; <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2019/#state/LA&s-tsid=byAttainment>
- xii TOPS Tech for Adults; A proposal by Louisiana Community and Technical College System.
- xiii Internal interview with the Louisiana Community and Technical College System.
- xiv Internal interview with the Louisiana Community and Technical College System.
- xv YouTube Channel of University of Louisiana System; https://youtu.be/_QjUxJ0PPQ
- xvi U.S. Census Bureau; Population Estimates; <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2010s-national-total.html>