

# SUPPORTING EDUCATORS IN LOUISIANA:

A Campaign to Increase Educator  
Awareness and Support of LEAP

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**PIE** network  
Policy Innovators  
in Education



# Educator Support is Key to the Success of State Assessments

Engaging educators on the development and rollout of state assessments is critical to ensuring the tests are used as tools to improve student outcomes and to avoid misinformation. Although it is a difficult task, state leaders and advocates have already led effective educator campaigns and continue to see impressive results when teachers become the champions. Findings from the RAND Corporation's 2017 American Teacher Panel revealed that among the subset of teachers who do not support their state tests, more than 40 percent were concerned about the test not providing useful data and the instructional time they needed for test preparation<sup>1</sup>. Knowing how important it is for states to engage teachers and support them with the resources they need to understand their state assessment and use the data to inform instruction, the PIE Network set out to detail the work of states that effectively engaged teachers and generated a meaningful understanding among educators of the value, purpose, and use of an annual assessment. Louisiana led such a campaign, and in fall 2017 the PIE Network talked to leaders at the Louisiana Department of Education, state advocates, and educators to get their perspectives on what made educator engagement on the state assessment successful, and to share how advocates and leaders created a statewide network of teachers delivering aligned instruction and authentically supporting the state assessment. Although many advocacy organizations partnered with the state in these efforts, PIE Network chose to focus on the work of Stand for Children Louisiana (Stand) in this study.



1 Kaufman, Julia H., Elaine Lin Wang, Laura S. Hamilton, Lindsey E. Thompson and Gerald Hunter. U.S. Teachers' Support of Their State Standards and Assessments: Findings from the American Teacher Panel. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2136.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2136.html).

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## CULTIVATING TEACHER LEADERS TO SET THE STAGE

Louisiana's education system has been recognized in recent years for achieving some of the most impressive growth in student outcomes in the nation, predominantly due to many of the reforms that have been implemented. The state adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010 to raise the expectations for students in Louisiana. After training educators and beginning standards implementation, the subsequent challenge was to ensure the state had a high-quality test in place that measured what was being taught in the classroom. The path to success was not always smooth, and the state faced a great deal of political controversy and debate around the implementation of the state assessment. While state leaders often faced an uphill battle, they focused intense efforts on supporting and involving educators in the rollout of the test and successfully overcame much controversy and opposition. As a result, Louisiana has seen improvement in student achievement and cultivated a statewide network of educators that is largely supportive of and values the state test. The efforts required strong leadership by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE), the support and collaboration of state advocates, and intentional, targeted communication backed by resources and strategic outreach.

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## SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE LEAP ASSESSMENT

Louisiana was originally a member of the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers consortium (PARCC), and students took the PARCC test in the 2014-15 school year. Like many other states, Louisiana withdrew from the consortia the following year, opting instead to develop their own comparable assessment that used questions from a variety of item banks, with 49 percent of the items coming from the PARCC bank. The test was known as the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP).

After adopting the CCSS, LDE quickly learned they needed to partner closely with districts to provide teachers with the resources and support needed to implement the standards. LDE had a network of 5,000 teacher leaders in place, with two to four teachers in each school. These teacher leaders met and collaborated with LDE representatives on a quarterly basis to discuss important issues and receive training on key initiatives that they could then share with colleagues in their schools. LDE leveraged these teacher leaders to provide robust professional development on aligning instruction to the standards and to illustrate the coherence between the standards, approved curricula, and the state test. Instructional supervisors, superintendents, and school-level staff all participated in these trainings, resulting in a strong network that was well-equipped to support classroom teachers as the state transitioned to a new assessment.

Even with a strong network of educators already in place, uncertainty and opposition towards standards and assessments lingered, often originating from contempt for or distrust in other policies, such as teacher evaluations and school letter grades. State leaders understood it was critical to be proactive in ensuring the right information and resources were in the hands of educators before the test was administered. Educators were similarly eager for information regarding the assessment so they would know what was expected of their students, could better align their instruction, and accurately inform parents and students.

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## **AN INTENTIONAL APPROACH TO SUPPORT TEACHERS THROUGH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

LDE recognized that to be effective they needed to be able to share assessment information and resources directly with teachers. Advocates also knew that the key to educator support was providing them with training that would reinforce their understanding of the test's value related to instruction and student outcomes. Leveraging the teacher leader network, LDE provided these ambassadors with the training and information they needed to conduct in-person professional learning opportunities in their districts about LEAP as it was rolled out. Many of the cadre members were also Stand fellows, creating a natural coordination and amplification of efforts. In addition, Stand leveraged their network of *Educator All Stars*, a group of more than 150 teachers who were established leaders with a knowledge of engaging and mobilizing educators, to hold webinars and training sessions to share the information and resources being distributed by LDE.

Similar to the strategic outreach that accompanied the implementation of the CCSS, these sessions reinforced the coherence of the standards, curriculum, and now the LEAP assessment. Teacher leaders provided guidance on how to effectively use the curriculum to deliver aligned instruction and develop classroom-based tasks that matched the rigor of the assessment, and how to use LEAP data to improve instruction and measure their own professional growth. Equally as important was ensuring teachers were confident and prepared to discuss LEAP with parents. LDE created a suite of resources that were distributed at the in-person events and made accessible online to help educators interpret score reports and have meaningful conversations with parents. The suite also included materials educators could share with parents, including a "Guide to the LEAP Student Report" to help explain a child's score and a "Guide to the LEAP Test" with basic information about timing, technology and types of test questions. This robust effort to develop and share resources with teachers through a variety of mediums resulted in a substantial increase in confidence and support among educators.



# PARENT GUIDE TO THE LEAP STUDENT REPORTS

## HOW DID MY CHILD DO THIS YEAR?

At the top of each report is your child's overall performance information including:

- his or her overall achievement level,
- overall scale score,
- the type of support your child will need based on his or her performance on the test, and
- how many points your child is from achieving Mastery indicating their readiness for the next grade level.

<b>STUDENT PERFORMANCE</b> <b>LEVEL 2</b> <b>SCORE 714</b> <b>APPROACHING BASIC</b>	<b>OVERALL STUDENT PERFORMANCE</b> Your student scored <b>714</b> on a scale of <b>650 to 850</b> , and performed at <b>Level 2</b> . Students performing at this level have partially met college and career readiness expectations, and will need much support to be prepared for the next level of studies in this content area.
	Your student is <b>xxx</b> points from Mastery. <i>Mastery indicates full readiness for the next grade level.</i>

The chart below outlines what each of the achievement levels means in terms of how well your child met the expectations for that grade and subject. The score ranges change slightly across grade levels and subjects.

LEVEL 5	ADVANCED (790-850)	Exceeded Expectations
LEVEL 4	MASTERY (750-789)	Met Expectations
LEVEL 3	BASIC (725-749)	Approached Expectations
LEVEL 2	APPROACHING BASIC (700-724)	Partially Met Expectations
LEVEL 1	UNSATISFACTORY (650-699)	Did Not Meet Expectations

## HOW DID MY CHILD DO IN COMPARISON TO OTHERS?

This section includes the school system and state performance averages so you can see how your child compares to other students in the same grade and subject area.

<b>SCHOOL SYSTEM AVERAGE</b> <b>LEVEL 3</b> <b>SCORE 731</b> <b>BASIC</b>	<b>STATE AVERAGE</b> <b>LEVEL 3</b> <b>SCORE 743</b> <b>BASIC</b>
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## HOW SHOULD I OR MY CHILD'S TEACHER USE THESE RESULTS?

The scores and ratings will be used to help teachers identify students who need additional support or more challenging work in each subject area. The information will also be used to measure how well schools and school systems are helping students achieve higher expectations.

As a parent, you can use the test results to guide a discussion with your child's teacher(s) about additional supports or enrichment that may be needed in class and at home.

# TEACHER GUIDE TO LEAP ELA AND MATH STUDENT REPORTS

## SPRING 2017 ENGLISH AND MATHEMATICS TESTS

This spring, your students took the LEAP tests in math and English language arts (ELA). Instead of merely isolating individual standards, the LEAP assessments use an integrated approach that asks students to apply their knowledge and show their understanding of mathematics, reading, and writing, similar to what happens in an effective classroom and in solving real-world tasks. The tests measure skills needed to be successful in key areas of math and ELA, which are grouped under major claims and/or subclaims on the student reports. This approach helps you (as a teacher) to better identify where a student may be struggling and how to support the student and his or her parents in building learning strategies for specific content areas.

ELA is reported in two major groups of standards (Reading & Writing):

<b>READING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literary Text</li> <li>• Informational Text</li> <li>• Vocabulary</li> </ul>	<b>WRITING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written Expression</li> <li>• Knowledge &amp; Use of Language Conventions</li> </ul>
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**MATHEMATICS**  $3+5=8$

is reported in the following groups of standards:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major Content</li> <li>• Additional &amp; Supporting Content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expressing Mathematical Reasoning</li> <li>• Modeling &amp; Application</li> </ul>
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## HOW TO READ THE STUDENT REPORT

Results from the LEAP test are provided in the form of student reports: one for ELA and one for math per student. The reports include:

- The student's overall score
- How the student is performing in comparison to other students in the school, district, and state
- A breakdown of how well the student performed in different subcategories within each subject area

At the top of each report, is the student's overall performance information, which consists of his or her overall achievement level, overall scale score, and the type of support the student will need based on his or her performance on the test. This section also includes the district and state performance averages so you can see how each student compares to other students in the same grade and subject area.

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## A PROACTIVE INFORMATION CAMPAIGN ON THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF LEAP

Often when there is opposition to an assessment, the instinct of state leaders is to avoid mention of it. LDE understood this to be a misguided and ineffective strategy, and that they would have to be proactive in initiating conversations around LEAP, acknowledge concerns, and correct misperceptions. To that end, the state embarked on an information campaign to communicate how and why LEAP is different and why it is important and in the best interest of Louisiana students. They used a core set of messages that were reinforced in all materials, resources, conversations, and trainings:

- **LEAP is a test worth taking. The questions ask students to use real world skills, like critical thinking, problem solving and writing.**
- **LEAP results provide better data than ever before, and show where students are doing well and where they need more support.**
- **Teachers can use the test results as a tool to help improve their instruction to meet student needs. Teachers will be provided with the support they need to use test data effectively.**
- **Louisiana students are just as smart and capable as students in any other state. They deserve a high-quality test that allows them to show what they know and can do.**

For educators, much of the negativity tied to the assessment centered on concerns with evaluations and accountability. In addition to this core set of messages, LDE and advocates emphasized a transitional period of four years, in which value added data would not be included in teacher evaluations and school letter grades.

For many states, educator outreach is difficult to do at scale, and this proved to be challenging for Louisiana. Despite the teacher leader model, concern lingered at LDE because of the uncertainty that information was being shared at each school thoroughly and faithfully. Because of this, the support of advocates proved pivotal in establishing secondary or complimentary avenues through which teachers could access information. To amplify the work of LDE, Stand again leveraged their Educator All Stars to distribute information about the professional learning opportunities, recruit teachers, and share resources with their personal networks. Stand also engaged The Associated Professional

Educators of Louisiana (A+PEL), a non-union teacher membership organization with more than 8,000 members, to act as an additional distribution partner, disseminating resources and recruiting educators to attend the in-person events. Furthermore, Stand employed a unique digital approach by creating an online forum for educators to share their own resources and best practices. Because the primary focus of the forum was peer-to-peer professional development it proved especially inviting to teachers, and created a direct channel Stand could use to share information and resources regarding LEAP.

The state quickly learned how important the support of administrators was to reaching a critical mass of teachers. More supportive principals encouraged their teachers to participate in the in-person events and created a more positive school climate around LEAP. Realizing this, LDE began hosting events and collaborations with principals to provide them with the same high quality resources and training they did for teachers, understanding that principals were a primary channel connecting the district to individual teachers.

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## **ENGAGING EDUCATORS MEANINGFULLY AT EVERY STEP ALONG THE WAY**

Louisiana State leaders strongly believed educators were essential partners in the process of developing and implementing assessments. In 2014, many Louisiana teachers were members of the PARCC Educator Leader Cadre, and so these educators knew firsthand what a high-quality assessment entailed and actively applied pressure to be involved in LEAP implementation. LDE responded by eagerly engaging their cohort of teacher leaders, asking for their direction and feedback on the approach to reaching educators, and conducting informal focus groups across the state to gain meaningful teacher input on implementation. To further ensure they satisfied the high demand for educator engagement, LDE also had teacher advisors on contract who vetted and reviewed test items and other content, and provided input on potential changes to the assessment. Although not every state has the capacity to engage teachers in this way, the role of a teacher advisor can be incorporated as part of advocacy and policy fellowships, so that teachers get meaningful experience and the state gets the valuable input they are looking for.

Additionally, Stand has a long history of engaging teachers in policy decisions. Their established network of educator advisors regularly meets with state legislators and state board members two to three times per year to discuss policy issues. Stand provided advisors with materials and resources to help them facilitate the discussions and used these relationships to reach legislators with important information about LEAP.



## IT WORKED: EDUCATORS PUBLICLY SUPPORT LEAP

One of the primary impacts of these collective efforts was the establishment of a more cohesive network of educators that value and support LEAP. Specifically, LDE was able to build stronger relationships directly with teachers and district leaders, and is now seen as a resource whom educators feel comfortable reaching out to with questions and turn to for support. Because of the high quality in-person events, teachers have a deeper understanding of the alignment between the standards, curriculum and assessment, and are delivering higher quality instruction every day. Recognizing the value and benefits of the test for themselves had a profound impact on teacher voice and engagement in policy. As they saw their students rise to the challenge, educators were more motivated to use their voice and speak up in support of the assessment, confident they were acting in the best interest of their students. They have also become more personally engaged in various ways, writing op-eds for local news outlets, leading professional learning in their districts, and more.

Teachers are also better equipped to effectively communicate and advocate for the assessment. They have the knowledge and resources they need to discuss the test and scores with parents, communicate why the assessment is important and in the best interest of their child, and are able to use the results to give parents a deeper understanding of their child's academic achievement. Educators' ability to support parents in each of these ways is essential to mitigating against the spread of misinformation and opposition among parents.

## THE WORK IS NOT DONE: EXPANDING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM IN 2018

LDE will continue to provide educators with assessment-based professional learning to use as part of daily instruction. With the launch of LEAP 360, the state's comprehensive assessment system with diagnostic and interim tests, educators have more resources to use in the classroom. Professional learning

“ Educators should be the face of these efforts, not advocates. ”

State Advocate

will continue to be teacher led, by a newly formed group of content leaders, who will be responsible for training educators on how to use assessment data. Stand will continue to amplify the work LDE leads, and will also focus on scaling LDE's initial efforts, aiming to ensure that every district has at least one assessment-based in-person professional learning event.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

The combined efforts of LDE and advocates garnered a deep level of understanding of and support for the state assessment among educators. As an increasing number of state advocates begin efforts to conduct similar work, we recommend they find guidance from these lessons learned in Louisiana:

- **CENTER OUTREACH ON PROFESSIONAL LEARNING.** Teachers do not want to be persuaded. Provide meaningful training on how teachers can use the test to inform their instruction, and share information on questions, development, and blueprints. This will help build trust in the test's value and its alignment with classroom instruction, and lead to authentic support for the assessment.
- **EDUCATORS SHOULD BE THE FACE OF THESE EFFORTS.** Teacher-led outreach is key. They know best what their colleagues want and need and are the most effective messengers and communication channel.
- **INCLUDE ADMINISTRATORS.** Principals are largely influential in determining teacher attitudes, and to ensure a school has a climate that is supportive of the state assessment and understands its value, principals must be involved. Principals connect the district to individual teachers and also need to have meaningful conversations about the test with their teachers and parents. Provide the same resources and opportunities for learning to principals that you do for teachers.
- **SUPPORT STATES IN CULTIVATING TEACHER LEADERS.** The LDE had an established network of teacher leaders, which was critical to achieving success. If a state does not have a network already in place, identify existing teacher leaders and advocates in the state who can play this role.

- **ANTICIPATE OPPOSITION.** Opposition and uncertainty around assessments are often caused by concerns about how the scores will be used. Be open in addressing these concerns early on and explain how the assessment scores will be used in a way that depicts the test as being in the best interest of students, and not punitive.
- **IDENTIFY THE COHERENCE BETWEEN STANDARDS, CURRICULUM, AND ASSESSMENTS.** Often times, teachers have the misperception that the test does not match what they do in class, so it is critical to help them see the connection. This helps teachers better align their instruction and understand how to articulate the holistic approach to parents, which is effective at garnering their support for the assessment.
- **LEVERAGE TEACHER NETWORKS TO INCREASE SCALE.** Leverage existing networks to help distribute information and professional learning to teachers across the state. If the networks cannot effectively reach a majority of educators statewide, identify additional levers you can use, such as digital or social media or by creating partnerships with district leaders.
- **DEVELOP AND DISTRIBUTE HIGH QUALITY RESOURCES.** Provide educators with resources they can share with parents to illustrate the value and purpose of the test. Educators are also looking for instructional resources that will help them better align their lessons to the standards and assessments, as well as those that give them more familiarity with the assessment itself.

Thank you to the staff at the Louisiana Department of Education, Stand for Children Louisiana, and the Louisiana educators who took time to share their valuable experiences and insights about this work.



**PIE**network  
— Policy Innovators  
in Education

510 1st Ave N.  
Ste 408  
Minneapolis, MN 55403

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