



July 1, 2015

All Students Valued in Proposed School Accountability Measure

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) submitted a renewal application for the state's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver with a significant shift to count diplomas earned by students with significant disabilities (assessed by LAA1) in the school accountability system. The Legislature passed Act 833 last year after advocates requested pathways for all students to earn a diploma and have the achievements of all students count in the school accountability system. Initially, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) expressed concerns over whether it was legal for Louisiana to offer alternative pathways to a diploma. It was therefore understandable that LDOE was hesitant to include diplomas earned by students on this alternative pathway in the ESEA waiver request in 2014. Fortunately, both in a report by the U.S. DOE and in a presentation by Melody Mosgrove, Director of Special Education for the U.S. DOE, to Louisiana stakeholders in May 2015, it was shared that U.S. DOE researched diplomas across the country and recognized the changes occurring in Louisiana were following how most other states balance the needs and outcomes of students with disabilities with the expectations for high stakes testing and accountability.

What is the significance of counting the achievements of students with disabilities in the school accountability measures? Awarding schools points for diplomas earned by students with significant disabilities removes a disincentive for schools to serve all students. In the high stakes world of education today, points matter – a lot. Schools deserve credit for serving every student, particularly students who tend to need the most supports and services.

Counting and valuing the diplomas earned by students with significant disabilities is a huge step forward in the state's education accountability system. While the graduation index impacted by this change is only one fourth of a high school performance score, the significance of recognizing the accomplishments of students with the most significant disabilities who earn diplomas in the school and district accountability measure is an incredible step forward. The Council is pleased the Louisiana Department of Education took this bold move and has committed to continued shifts toward fully valuing achievements and outcomes of all students.