

September 7, 2018

Superintendent John White  
Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE)  
1201 North Third St.  
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

Dear Superintendent White:

The Council would appreciate your consideration in providing information related to issues pertaining to funding related to special education.

First, the Council notes that Louisiana faces a chronic shortage in certified special education teachers.<sup>1</sup> The Council is interested in learning why the state does not extend the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) Tuition (Free) Program for Teachers to be certified in special education. BESE's Tuition Program is designed to address the need for teachers certified in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). While it is admirable Louisiana is focused on STEM, a critical missing piece is addressing gaps in performance between students with disabilities and their peers in STEM as well as basic skills. The NAPE and Louisiana's own assessments have documented the achievement gaps. Severe shortages of teachers certified in special education exacerbate these gaps. The Council would appreciate LDOE sharing how it intends to prioritize encouragement of teacher candidates to pursue coursework leading to special education certification.

Second, vacancies exist in pupil appraisal personnel, professionals critical to Child Find and related services for students with disabilities. The Louisiana School Psychological Association reports more than 50 vacancies for school psychologists across our state. The Council was discouraged to learn of LDOE's decision to cease funding of programs related to special education, such as the Louisiana School Psychology Internship Consortium (LAS\*PIC) and the Teams Intervening Early to Reach All Students (TIERS). LAS\*PIC has a 28 year history of attracting school psychologists from the nation's top graduate programs and providing an accredited internship experience recognized by the American Psychological Association. Approximately half of the interns of LAS\*PIC continued working in Louisiana schools long after their internship ended. Many hold leadership positions in school systems. LAS\*PIC was funded by LDOE since its inception in 1990 until 2014. Without funding, the LAS\*PIC operated the last four years through the Louisiana State University, Health Sciences Center, Human Development Center (LSU-HSC-HDC) staff volunteering their time. Unfortunately, this burden became too much to expect of LSU-HSC-HDC staff to continue without compensation. LAS\*PIC will cease operation after this school year, depriving the state of a recruiting resource for critical personnel. The Council would appreciate an explanation of LDOE's plan for addressing the shortage of school psychologists and how LDOE will fill the gap left by ceasing support of a program which has attracted many school psychologists to work in Louisiana.

Similarly, LDOE ended funding support for the TIERS program. Ironically, the timing of the LDOE decision to cease funding for the TIERS program, a Louisiana university based initiative, occurred after the TIERS staff provided LDOE with critical information related to evidence-based applications for schools to use in behavioral interventions and effective early intervening services through Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. It seems the information gleaned from the TIERS report led to LDOE issuing a Request For Information to identify ‘partners’ who have the expertise and experience in assisting school systems in implementing evidence-based behavioral interventions. Yet because LDOE ceased funding TIERS, it no longer has the expertise of TIERS staff for evaluating and identifying well equipped respondents to the RFI who can assist schools in implementing the strategies and practices recommended by the TIERS Group. In not funding the TIERS Group, LDOE has eliminated access to a proven Louisiana university-based program.

The loss of access to the resources provided by the TIERS Group is particularly disturbing since LDOE could not respond to a question posed last November, 2017, by Council staff regarding which LDOE staff possess unique certifications, qualifications, and/or training that enable them to provide training and technical assistance, as well as, assess, monitor and support schools in crisis prevention, functional behavioral assessments and individualized behavioral intervention plans, and across the tiers of PBIS practices. It is not clear who LDOE intends to rely on to expertly evaluate responses to the recently released RFI for behavioral support partners.

The Council would appreciate LDOE explaining how it intends to address these issues statewide given the decisions to cease funding to the programs described above.

Your consideration of these requests is appreciated. Please direct correspondence to this request to Shawn Fleming, Deputy Director at the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council at [shawn.fleming@la.gov](mailto:shawn.fleming@la.gov).

Respectfully,



April Dunn  
Chairperson

AD:SF

cc: Jamie Wong  
Katie Barras

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<sup>i</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. [Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing 1990-1991 through 2017-2018](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/pol/bteachershortageareasreport201718.pdf). Published May 2017. Link: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/pol/bteachershortageareasreport201718.pdf>