



### **Education and Employment (E/E) Committee Summary**

Wednesday, October 16, 2024

5615 Corporate Blvd. Ste. 300A, Baton Rouge, LA 70808

3:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Virtual via Zoom ([Register](#)) / [Virtual Meeting Protocols](#)

Streaming Live on [YouTube](#)

View meeting transcript [here](#).

**Members Present:** Melissa Bayham, Christi Gonzales, Meredith Jordan, Tony Piontek, Erick Taylor, Renoda Washington (Chair), Vivienne Webb

**Members Absent:** Jamar Ennis, Phil Wilson

**Staff:** Brenton Andrus, Rekeesha Branch, Stephanie Carmona, Ebony Haven, Hannah Jenkins

**Others Present:** Constance Alphonse, Marilee Andrews, Kristie Curtis, Erin Downing, Mylinda Elliott, Nicole Flores, April Hampton, Jill Hano, Angela Harmon, Lynsey Hebert (transcriptionist), Chanel Jackson, Christina Martin, Ashley McReynolds, Kelly Monroe, Pasqueal Nguyen, Jacki Pierce, Bambi Polotzola, Susan Riehn, Marilyn Thornton, Mimi Webb

Renoda Washington called the meeting to order at 3:03 pm. A quorum was established.

Tony Piontek motioned to approve the [July 2024 E/E Committee Summary](#), Vivienne Webb seconded. There was a roll call vote with 7 Yes, 0 Nays, and 0 Abstentions.

### **Education and Employment Updates**

In the meeting, Melissa Bayham from Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) provided an update.

- LRS faces funding challenges, leaving up to 50% of federal funding untapped due to a lack of matching state funds, amounting to \$29 million this year. LRS is underfunded and understaffed but committed to providing services and finding efficiencies.
- Highlighted "third-party cooperative arrangements" as a key strategy for pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS). These contracts allow school districts to provide transition specialists using local or state funds, enabling LRS to secure additional federal dollars. Nineteen (19) school districts have active contracts, with two (2) more expected by August 2025, and several others in discussions.
- Additionally, LRS has been conducting in-depth staff training, dubbed the "VR journey," to ensure consistent services across the state.

Lastly, there are plans for vendors providing pre-employment transition services to reapply, ensuring high-quality programs for students with disabilities.

Meredith Jordan from the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) then provided updates, including policy updates due to legislation passed at the 2024 legislative session. SEAP has endorsed all of these changes and will go to BESE for final say in December.

- LDOE will reimburse parents up to \$500 for additional dyslexia testing following an at-risk result from the statewide screener. This reimbursement can be applied through school systems or approved private vendors, with the policy expected to be fully implemented by spring 2025.
- Local Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) reports include IDEA finance details, student performance data, and compliance issues.
- Updates to the Parent Procedural Safeguards Handbook are underway, including family support contacts and new legal timelines for parental responses.
- New eligibility criteria for the LEAP Connect alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities aim to reduce participation to meet the federal cap of 1%. Adjustments include removing adaptive behavior as a criterion and tightening standard deviation requirements. Current high school students will be kept on the pathway that they are on, but it will be phased out for new upcoming students.

The status of LDOE's contract with Families Helping Families in New Orleans (NOLA) was questioned. Ms. Jordan clarified the organization is no longer operational, so to provide support in the region, LDOE has partnered with the Arc to offer assistance and will share their contact information. She also noted that while the Greater New Orleans (GNO) location is doing great work, they are at capacity, especially in the Jefferson area, so additional support was necessary.

### **Contractual Activities**

The committee also received updates on the contractual activity in Goal 3 of the Council's FY24 action plan. The Arc finished the [education and employment training](#) across the state where 138 individuals were trained. Additional information on that activity and on Goal 3 is available in the [Status of Planned Activities Report](#).

Lastly, committee members were asked to come prepared for the January meeting with recommendations of concepts for the upcoming five-year plan, as well as activities for the 2026 federal fiscal plan.

There was no public comments and the meeting adjourned by unanimous consent at 3:46 pm.