

Education and Employment (E/E) Committee Summary

Wednesday, January 29, 2025

Embassy Suites Hotel, Caucus Room

4914 Constitution Ave., Baton Rouge, LA 70808

2:15 PM – 3:45 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, Jude Boynton, Adrienne Burns, Brenda Cossé, Kristie Curtis, Erin Downing, Liam Doyle, Mylinda Elliott, Nicole Flores, Marilyn Goodwin, April Hampton, Jill Hano, Lynsey Hebert (transcriptionist), Chanel Jackson, Christina Martin, Lamartine Meda, Pasqueal Nguyen, Jacki Pierce, Susan Riehn, Robby Smith, Jessica Walker, Mimi Webb, Geary Williams, and Zheng “Karen” Xu

Renoda Washington called the meeting to order at 2:25 pm. A quorum was established.

Erick Taylor motioned to approve the [October 2024 E/E Committee Summary](#). Vivienne Webb seconded. There was a roll call vote with 5 Yes, 0 Nays, and 0 Abstentions.

LRS Update

Melissa Bayham from Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) provided an update on third-party cooperative arrangements with school districts. Currently, 19 agreements are in place, with three more expected to start in August 2025. About 625 students receive pre-employment transition services, with 300 participating in work-based learning. LRS is reviewing vendor applications to ensure quality and consistency.

Concerns were raised about employers exploiting workers with disabilities for tax benefits. Ms. Bayham stated that while LRS aims for permanent job placements, they sometimes do not know an employer’s true intentions, but stop referring candidates if they are identified as exploitative.

Staffing shortages remain a major challenge, with each counselor handling up to 200 cases. Louisiana also lacks enough state funding to access its full federal vocational rehabilitation budget, operating at half capacity and returning more federal funds than any other state.

LDOE Update

Meredith Jordan from the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) announced Louisiana's education ranking improved from 43rd to 32nd, with students with disabilities making significant gains in reading and math due to increased inclusion efforts. Students with disabilities in the state outperformed national averages in reading and math, marking a significant milestone in special education, attributing this progress to recent efforts to improve inclusive practices in schools.

A legislative audit on seclusion, restraint, and mistreatment of students with disabilities found LDOE follows current laws but needs improvements. Recommendations included giving LDOE oversight of seclusion and restraint incidents, ensuring accurate reporting, and requiring schools to publicly post policies on special education classroom cameras for transparency.

Recommendations for Activities for the FFY26 Planning Committee

The committee discussed advocating for more vocational rehabilitation funding, employer accountability, and better special education oversight. Since the Arc of Louisiana is already advocating for an additional \$19 million to help Louisiana draw down its full federal allocation, the committee agreed to support these efforts and consider signing onto the Arc's advocacy initiative.

Other recommendations included improving transparency in special education camera policies by requiring districts to post relevant forms online. The committee also explored ways to promote inclusive education amid national discussions questioning the benefits of inclusive settings.

As the meeting concluded, the committee approved recommendations for the federal fiscal year 2026 action plan to be sent to the full council for a vote.

Recommendations for Concepts for the 2027-2031 5-year plan

Due to time constraints, further discussions on these topics were scheduled for the full council meeting.

E/E Contractual Updates

Due to time constraints, committee members found the information on that activity and on Goal 3 available in the [Status of Planned Activities Report](#).

There was no public comments and the meeting adjourned by unanimous consent at 3:51 pm.