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Governor Jindal Unveils Education Reform Plan

BATON ROUGE: - Governor Bobby Jindal addressed the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI) annual meeting today where he outlined his bold plans to reform Louisiana's education system. Governor Jindal said that the way forward is to provide more choices to families, reward teachers, and give school leaders more flexibility with funding and personnel.

Below Are The Governor's Full Remarks As Prepared For Delivery:

"Thank you to LABI for inviting me and congratulations on another successful Annual Meeting.

"Over the last couple of months, I have been visiting schools and meeting with parents, teachers, students, union leaders and legislators to hear about their ideas for improving our schools and to get a firsthand look at what our schools are doing right and what they can do better

"Every school I visited was different, but they were all successful in different ways.

"I visited a Montessori School in Alexandria, a school using the New Tech High model in Ruston, a school using a teacher improvement and merit pay program in Northwest Louisiana, and a school with a robust dual enrollment and a dropout prevention program in Assumption.

"These schools couldn't be more different, but they all have a common thread –

innovation. They are creating systems that best meet the needs of their students.

“When I went to these schools I asked them how we could empower them to do more of what worked and eliminate obstacles to help them end practices that waste money on programs that don’t work.

“After our schools visits and meetings, it’s clear that our path to reform centers around three pillars:

- Putting a highly effective teacher in every classroom
- Giving parents and students an equal opportunity in education; and
- Giving school leaders more flexibility to spend their dollars on policies that improve student achievement

“Over the past four years, we’ve already taken steps to meet these goals, including:

- Creating the Red Tape Waiver to help local school districts cut through red tape and provide schools with the flexibility needed to improve student performance;
- Starting the student-based budgeting pilot to put the decisions about dollars in the hands of people closest to students;
- Passing a new value added teacher evaluation system that gives personalized feedback on student achievement to teachers;
- Adopting the Common Core State Standards, which will raise expectations for every child;
- Creating the scholarship program in New Orleans to give parents of students at failing schools more opportunity to meet their children’s needs;
- Expanding the number of charter schools; and
- Supporting the significant growth of the Louisiana Virtual School.

“Even though we have made progress, 44 percent of our schools are still receiving Ds and Fs.

“On national metrics, like the National Assessment of Educational Progress, we are in the bottom five states in fourth and eighth grade math and reading.

“I could go on and on about rankings, but it’s clear that we need to move faster and we need to do it now.

“Our children do not have time to wait. They only grow up once and they have one shot to receive a quality education.

“We can’t wait for another generation of students to graduate from high school unprepared for the workforce and higher education – or to dropout before they even get there.

“This applies not only to K-12 education, but to early childhood education as well.

“My plan to improve our schools encompasses early childhood education and K-12 education – and does three things – empowers teachers, empowers parents, and empowers school leaders.

EMPOWERING TEACHERS

“I’ve said this before and I will say it again – teachers are the backbone of our education system.

“They are the heart and soul of what makes our schools run and we should be celebrating them, promoting them, and telling them how much we appreciate their service.

“That’s why over the last four years, we’ve taken the following steps to support our teachers, including:

- Instituting a teacher pay raise that brought the average teacher salary up to the SREB average;
- Creating a Teacher's Bill of Rights and stronger discipline laws to support teachers in the classroom;
- Signing a law to prohibit teachers from completing duplicate, burdensome paperwork to decrease the amount of time a teacher spends on paperwork in the classroom;
- Expanding the Teacher Advancement Program, a teacher merit pay model that has been shown to improve teacher effectiveness. Louisiana is just one of three states to have an extensive program; and
- Creating a new value-added evaluation system, which actually evaluates teachers on the one metric that matters – student achievement.

“We’ve established strong building blocks to make sure we have a great teacher in every classroom, but we need to do more.

“Having a highly effective teacher and the impact on a student cannot be emphasized enough.

“In a recent op-ed in the New York Times, Nick Kristoff asked this question: what should you do if your child’s terrific fourth grade teacher decided to retire?

“His response? Hold a bake sale, go door to door, and come up with a \$100,000 bonus to get that teacher to stay.

“Why? Because the potential impact that that teacher will have on your child’s future income far exceeds that sum.

“The opposite is also true. Kristoff says it makes much more sense to pay a bad teacher a \$100,000 buyout to get them to leave the classroom – and replace them with a merely average teacher – because the future income loss of your child will be far greater if they stay in that teacher’s classroom.

“These kinds of numbers are astounding, but they reveal the heart of new research that was recently released from a group of Harvard and Columbia professors.

“Having a good fourth grade teacher makes your student more likely to go to college and less likely to get pregnant as a teenager.

“The study found that by looking at roughly 2.5 million students over 20 years that elementary and middle school teachers that are highly effective will have long lasting, positive economic and social effects on their students’ lives.

“The bottom line is that having a great teacher can change a kid’s life. I bet many of you can remember that great teacher you had that made a lasting impact on your life.

“The solution to this problem may seem simple – just replace all the poor performing teachers with excellent teachers, right?

“Unfortunately it’s not that simple. The current system is holding us back.

“Let me describe a hypothetical company to you. In this company, people are hired by a board. Then they are assigned to their jobs by this board with little input from the person who is ultimately going to be their boss and have to work with them.

“Once in their jobs, they are told to work hard, but there is no accountability for their

performance. Whether they are doing a great job or a poor one, they get no recognition for their hard work and are treated the same.

“They are expected to keep working hard even if they have colleagues who are not working hard next door.

“In fact, they are expected to make up the work that is not being done by their colleagues by working even harder.

“After three years of this, if they have survived, they are given lifetime job protection. Short of selling drugs in the workplace or beating up one of the business’ clients, they can never be fired.

“They are paid according to how long they have been on the job, regardless of their performance.

“If they want to advance in their careers, they have to leave the jobs they love and go into administrative positions to make more money.

“Finally, when their boss tries to remove that coworker who hasn’t been doing their job for years, they have to get permission from the board and then they have to have a public showdown with the employee that typically takes nine months to a year and costs thousands of dollars.

“Having gone through this process once or twice, their boss decides it’s not worth it and tries moving his low performing employees around to mitigate their impact on the overall production of the business.

“This is the system we have today. We don’t treat teachers like professionals, denying opportunity and advancement to good teachers.

“Our system today often crushes talented teachers and it makes their jobs harder, not easier.

“If any actual business was set up like this, they would go under in a matter of months. That’s what’s about to happen to our education system.

“This is one of the most critical professions we have in Louisiana and yet we are strangling it by chasing the talent away.

“No matter if you do a good job or a poor job, teach English or music, teach high poverty or middle class students, we treat everyone the same. No wonder half of our new teachers are not teaching in our public schools five years after graduating.

“This has to stop. We’re going to run our education system and our economy into the ground unless we reform this backwards structure today.

“That’s why we are going to finally recognize good teachers, promoting this profession the way it should be, and ensuring that every child has a high quality teacher.

“Our plan to empower teachers has new components for current and incoming teachers, but they all boil down to two very simply ideas – we are going to create a system that pays teachers for doing a good job instead of for the length of time they have been breathing and we’re going to give districts the tools to recognize and keep the best teachers.

“Before I get into the details of my plan, I want to make one thing very clear about what this means for teachers.

“The coalition of the status quo is going to say my plan hurts teachers and hurts public education. They are going to do whatever it takes to say reform is a bad idea. They are going to argue for the status quo.

“It’s just the opposite. That type of rhetoric is insulting to the people across this state demanding better schools.

“Teaching is not only one of the most important professions in the world; it’s also one of the toughest professions.

“That’s why we want to reward teachers for taking on this important role and give them the tools to succeed and help our kids succeed.

“For all teachers, we’re proposing six changes.

“First, we’re going to empower districts to use compensation to keep good teachers by stopping forced pay increases to ineffective teachers, allowing them to pay effective teachers more, and by allowing them more flexibility in how they structure salaries.

“Second we’re going to ban the practice of using seniority to make personnel decisions of any kind, including ending the practice of “last in, first out” in reductions in force, prioritizing effectiveness instead. Performance-blind personnel decisions cost money and talent.

“Third, we’re going to empower superintendents and principals and get school boards out of the hiring and firing business.

“Fourth, we’re going to stop blanket job protection in the form of tenure to teachers who are ineffective after one year. They will simply return to probationary status. Under our nationally recognized value-added law, districts start dismissal proceedings after two years, and teachers lose certification after three years of ineffectiveness ratings.

“Fifth, we’re going to give the superintendents, not school boards, the lead role in the public hearing process when he or she decides that a poor performing teacher should be removed.

“Sixth, we’re going to tie teacher certification to effectiveness, removing the red tape of meaningless federal “highly qualified teacher” requirements, and emphasize effectiveness when we select our Teachers and Principals of the Year.

“For incoming teachers, we’re going to make three changes.

“First, we’re going to give districts the flexibility to create their own salary scales based on the elements they believe matter to them, such as effectiveness, hard to staff subjects, high poverty schools, and core subjects.

“Second, we’re going to reserve tenure status for teachers that have been highly effective for five years in a row.

“Third and finally, we’re going to make the granting of tenure an active process rather than an automatic one, so that tenure becomes a reward and recognition given to teachers who have done a terrific job, rather than a sign that they have merely survived for three years.

“This is a bold plan and a signal to teachers – at all career stages – that help is on the way.

“To all the young teachers out there – if we continue down the current path, you will never get recognized for your talent, you will never be paid what you are worth, and you will have to pick up the slack for your underperforming colleagues. With these reforms, you will finally be recognized for your value, no matter how old you are.

“To the seasoned veteran teachers who are hard working and excellent at their jobs, let me tell you about how this system benefits you.

“Since you are so effective, it doesn’t matter that decisions can’t be made on seniority because you’ll be recognized for your worth, and you will have the opportunity to take on additional leadership roles in your school, mentoring your younger colleagues and be paid to do it.

“To teachers who want to improve, we will finally give you the information, support, and incentives to do better.

“To mid-career switchers who want to go into the classroom, you can be rewarded from day one for bringing your work experience to bear on your teaching as a truly effective educator.

“If you are great at what you do, we want you in Louisiana schools.

“If you are currently enrolled in college, even high school, you’re mid-career and looking for a new opportunity, or you’re thinking about retiring – choose teaching.

“We’ll recognize you for what you are worth and pay you for it.

EMPOWERING PARENTS

“The second group of people that we need to empower is parents.

“Every child deserves an equal opportunity in education.

“Many families can help their kids get a good education by moving to an area with good public schools, or sending their kids to a private school.

“The reality though is that many families cannot afford to move and are unable to pay for private school.

“No child should have his or her potential shortchanged because his or her parents can’t

afford to move to another town or drive their child across the parish to find a better option.

“We know that our children are unique. They learn differently and they need different things. Yet our system is set up so that we treat students all the same.

“Today, we say to parents “tough luck” if you happen to live where there aren’t a lot of options.

“We say “tough luck” if you can’t afford to pay to send your student to private school.

“The current system is unacceptable and unfair.

“Parents and kids should not be trapped in a failing school because of their zip code, income, gender or color.

“Every child has a right to an excellent education. That’s the promise of America.

“We know parents know their children best, yet we have a system that decides what’s best for them, rather than empowering them to make a choice.

“That’s why I am going to expand choices for parents in eighth ways.

“First, our plan will expand the existing Scholarship Program statewide for low-income students at C, D and F schools.

“Second, we are going to expand course choices for students by allowing a variety of providers, including school districts, virtual schools, colleges and universities, and businesses with training programs, to offer students additional options.

“Third, we’re going to plan our Career and Technical Education regionally to better meet the needs of businesses and address individual student interests, while also ensuring that students have access to full Industry Based Certification programs.

“Fourth, we’re going to encourage students who want to pursue a career in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math by making it easier to take high level coursework, recognizing when they are successful with that coursework, and helping districts make those courses available.

“Fifth, we are going to make it easier for high quality charter operators to expand by fast tracking operators with proven track records, streamlining the application process, and giving charter schools the same rights to facilities.

“Sixth, our plan will allow charter operators who want to open schools in districts with grades of D and F the opportunity to apply directly to the state.

“Seventh, we’re going to create a rebate for donations made to nonprofit organizations that offer scholarships to low-income students to attend private school.

“Eighth, we’re going to give a scholarship to students who graduate early from high school equal to one-half of the dollars we would have spent had they prolonged their time in high school. Students will be able to use these dollars as a scholarship—above and beyond any other scholarships—at the postsecondary school of their choice.

“Our plan to empower parents will also give them more levers to effect change in their schools.

“First, we’re going to let community organizations, nonprofits, universities, and other local entities apply to the state to become charter authorizers. They can work directly with charter operators and maintain local control of charter schools in their communities.

“Second, we are going to give parents whose children are at a failing school a parent

trigger to effect change on that school more quickly. Instead of waiting until the school has been failing for four years, parents can vote to have their school eligible to be a Recovery School District charter after three years.

“Third, our plan will hold school boards in failing school districts accountable for the performance of their superintendents by requiring state review of their superintendent contracts to make sure there are performance targets for improvement.

“Fourth, I’m calling on the state board of elementary and secondary education to change how we fund students so that dollars follow the child to whatever educational option meets their needs.

“Fifth, we are going to open up the market to good ideas and allow the entrepreneurs and innovators to make them work. Some of these innovators are working in our districts today, some in our charter schools, and some have not yet entered the market.

“We know that educating our students is difficult work and we need all the help and smart ideas we can recruit to get the job done.

“Let me be clear – this plan is not about pitting school boards vs. charter schools or teachers unions vs. parents.

“This is about making sure all parents have an opportunity to get a quality education for their children.

“There are a number of school districts across the state that are meeting student needs, and there are a lot of school leaders that are thinking outside the box when it comes to doing this in innovative ways.

“For example, in Calcasieu Parish, they have started an alternative school that has both classes in person and courses online. Districts like Calcasieu could apply too to be statewide online providers.

“Or take for example the school district down in Lafourche. They have been looking at new ways to incorporate virtual education into their portfolio of schools to meet the needs of the large home school population in that parish.

“Or take Terrebonne Parish where they are spending more instructional time in third grade on reading and math fundamentals as building blocks for future success in school.

“This is the kind of innovation we need to get the job done for our students.

“Finally, we know how important parent involvement is to student achievement.

“In my visits around the state, I’ve heard again and again that parents need to be more engaged.

“To be clear, schools still have to be held accountable for teaching our students, but parents play a role too. The parent is a child’s first teacher and high quality education is a team effort.

“Like we need to expand our definition of who provides publicly funded education—traditional schools, charter schools, private schools, virtual schools, or colleges and universities—we need to engage our parents in this important reform.

“We’ve listened and we agree and that’s why we’re going to do two things.

“First, let superintendents and principals reward teachers for engaging parents. We know good teachers actively engage parents anyway, and we should reward them for being successful.

“Second, we’re going to give districts more ways to engage parents with federal dollars

for tutoring and after school programs and be rewarded for it, which also saves parents money for after school care.

EMPOWERING SCHOOL LEADERS

“The third group we need to empower is school leaders. They know their communities and their students better than folks in Baton Rouge or Washington, DC, and we shouldn’t be forcing a one-size-fits-all system on them.

“Just like each teacher is unique and each student is unique, each school and each school system is unique, whether that be a traditional school, a network of charters, or a private school.

“If we give school leaders the ability to innovate, then we can improve student achievement at a quicker pace. We have to give school districts the opportunity to compete.

“That is the idea behind our student based budgeting pilot that is going on this year in six districts.

“It gives principals greater control over budgeting decisions in their own buildings so that they can tailor their strategies to the student populations they serve.

“It’s also the idea behind the Seat Time Waiver, which lets districts decide how to structure the school day. Today, too often, we count the minutes that children are sitting in seats as if that was a true indicator for learning.

“Nationally, we have doubled per student spending over the last forty years and in Louisiana, just over the last four years, the total MFP has increased by more than \$300 million.

“Yet student achievement has stayed flat. The truth is that we know that it’s not about how much money we spend, but how we spend it.

“To paraphrase, Albert Einstein once said that the definition of insanity is to keep doing the same failed things over and over again, and expecting a different result.

“We need to fund the things that work and the people that can get the job done, and stop sending good money after bad to the programs that don’t work.

“First, our plan to give districts flexibilities on personnel and compensation will let districts recruit the best and brightest personnel, retain them by rewarding them, and make smart decisions about who to employ so as to maximize their investment in human capital.

“We know that personnel costs make up the majority of school and district budgets, and that effective teachers increase the future incomes of their students, so the flexibilities I’m proposing will give districts the tools to spend smarter on the people who can raise student achievement.

“Second, we are going to give districts more flexibility over their federal dollars through applying to waive burdensome federal regulations and let schools spend their federal dollars in the ways that work for them.

“Third, we are going reduce federal reporting requirements and more strategically align our interventions in failing schools, including those required by federal law, to meet the unique needs of our students.

“Instead of requiring a one-size-fits-all solution, districts should have a menu of options that work for them.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

“Finally, we need to focus on our earliest learners, empower the providers of those early childhood services and parents who are looking for the best option for their child.

“Today, we have nearly \$1.4 billion going into publicly funded early childhood education and health care programs, not even including an additional \$150 million for Head Start. Yet we have very little idea what kind of quality we are getting with those dollars.

“What we do know is not encouraging: according to the data we have today, only 52 percent of children are entering Kindergarten ready to learn.

“Further, those funding streams are disjointed and misaligned, both to one another and to standards that promote Kindergarten Readiness. The result is that we’re not leveraging the dollars we have today as effectively as we could and we’re not ensuring that students are receiving high quality early childhood education.

“That means that the system is difficult to navigate for the childcare center, pre-schools, and other programs that provide early childhood services and is difficult for parents trying to use it.

“We already have some key components to a truly successful outcomes based early childhood system. Indeed, we have high quality models like LA4 and the Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development scholarship program, experience with accountability in K-12 that promotes success rather than mandating paperwork, and experience coordinating services across agencies at the state level through the Coordinated Systems of Care.

“Last year, we established a Kindergarten Readiness Assessment that will for the first time tell us if students are entering Kindergarten ready to learn, from which programs they came, and where we should look for best practices to learn from statewide.

“However, we’re not using this data today to the greatest extent possible. That’s why we are going to empower our early childhood providers and preschools and our parents by:

“Reducing red tape, aligning conflicting standards, and streamlining data to reduce the administrative burden for early childhood providers and better leverage dollars.

“Creating an accountability system for early childhood programs focused on outcomes and based on Kindergarten Readiness that gives parents clear actionable information in a letter grade on which to base their decisions about where to send their child.

“Protecting our taxpayers by cutting off public funding to low performing early childhood programs, even pulling licensing from low-performing programs, and aligning our incentive structure through the School Readiness Tax Credits to reward Kindergarten Readiness.

“These early childhood education reforms will help us set high expectations for our students so they will enter Kindergarten better prepared.

“In conclusion, the way forward is to provide more choices to families, reward teachers, and give school leaders more flexibility with funding and personnel.

“The bottom line is that our kids only grow up once and we cannot wait for the system to reform itself. It’s about more than our kids succeeding inside the classroom; it’s about them succeeding in life.

“Look at any study about healthcare outcomes, incarceration rates, income levels – and it all comes back to education.

“I’m confident that when we institute these reforms, Louisiana’s quality of life will improve and our state will become an even better place to start or move a business.

“Throughout this process, there are going to be a lot of accusations made and a lot of name-calling, but through it all remember why we are in this fight – it’s to give our kids a world class education.

“We all need to check our party affiliations, ideologies, and political agendas at the door when it comes to improving our schools. Giving our kids a quality education should not be a partisan issue.

“Our kids deserve an opportunity to succeed and it’s a basic right that everyone should be afforded in America.

“We have outperformed the southern and national economies over the past four years, and if we want to continue doing so, we must improve our schools.

“We live in an aspirational society and the opportunity to receive a quality education is part of the American Dream.

“The time to act is now. I want each of you to join me in this fight and make the pledge to improve our schools and give every child an opportunity to get a great education and make Louisiana the best place in the world to raise a family and find a good-paying job.

“Thank you.”

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