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DEPARTMENT DISTRIBUTES NEARLY $260 MILLION IN FEDERAL RELIEF FUNDING TO SCHOOL SYSTEMS

May 01, 2020

Department Provides Guidance on How to Ensure Strong Start to Next School Year

BATON ROUGE, La. -- The Louisiana Department of Education will today distribute nearly $260 million in federal relief funding to school systems statewide to support their efforts to recover from school facility closures amid the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and to ensure a strong start to the 2020-2021 school year. The Department has provided detailed guidance to school systems on how to prioritize spending these dollars to meet those goals.

"While the Department continues to monitor and respond to the evolving public health crisis, we are shifting our focus to helping school systems address unfinished learning from the 2019-2020 school year, set the foundation for continuous learning in 2020-2021 and prepare for potential modified operations in the future," said Acting State Superintendent Beth Scioneaux.

Federal Relief Funding and Spending Guidance

The federal government, through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act allocated $287 million to Louisiana for K-12 education. Of that total, about $260 million will go directly to school systems today. With the remaining money, the Department will establish additional grant opportunities for school systems to support critical priorities.

Today's allocations will be distributed according to a formula determined by the federal government, meaning each school system will receive varying amounts depending on their student populations.

To help school systems prioritize how they spend these dollars, the Department released a guide that outlines how they should build on the 2020-2021 academic plans they had developed before school facilities were closed to meet new academic and operational demands.

View the Strong Start 2020 Planning Guide. (will open in new tab)

Strong Start 2020

In its guidance, the Department articulated a strong start to 2020-2021 will ensure:

- Every student's academic needs are identified at the beginning of the year using high-quality diagnostic tools and assessments that align to Louisiana's learning standards.
- There is a plan for every student, including extra time and support for students with the greatest unfinished learning from the prior year.
- There are clear next steps for every high school student and recent graduate who will enter a new economy.

Additionally, the Department advised all school systems to have strong yet agile continuous education plans that provide standards-aligned instruction using high-quality curriculum during school facilities closures or modified operations, including provisions for:

- 1:1 device and internet access, including assistive technology for students with disabilities;
- A strategic communications plan to connect with every student on a daily basis, provide weekly feedback on students' work, and communicate a family's role in supporting their child's continuous learning;
- Versatile delivery methods for instruction, related services, and professional development;
- Adaptive staffing models that optimize teaching talent and student support; and
- Flexible and opportunistic calendars and school schedules that maximize learning opportunities in a dynamic public health context.

"As we plan for 2020 and beyond, educators aim to ensure quality and consistency of instruction and access to continuous learning for all students," said Ashley Ellis, who represents District 5 on the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and who is an assistant principal at Neville High School in Monroe. "The guidance affirms these top priorities and positions us to build on our existing school plans to make them even stronger, while the funding will help us realize our goals."

"Louisiana is committed to serving every child, every day and to ensuring a strong start to the next school year. But in order to be successful, we must close the opportunity gaps that exist for many of our children," said BESE Member Preston Castille, who represents District 8. "We must focus our dollars on the children who need it most, including those who lack the technology to support their learning and those with disabilities."

Next Steps

Next week, the Department will release additional resources to ensure a strong start to the new school year. The resources will be geared toward K-12 school and early childhood education leaders.

The Department also plans to release information and resources designed for families ahead of students heading back to school.

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