Louisiana is continuing its five-year transition to more rigorous standards and higher quality assessments. As part of this transition, in November 2013, the Department of Education announced its transition policy proposal. The goal of this proposal is to maintain Louisiana’s commitment to higher expectations for all, but to also ensure the gradual transition gives educators and students adequate time to learn the new expectations.

This document is intended to clarify the specifics of those proposals and to answer common questions received thus far.

**Timeline and Long-term Goals**

* **What are the Common Core State Standards?**

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are fundamental descriptions of reading, writing, and math skills that focus on the ability to think independently.

* **Why are we adopting the CCSS?**

Most jobs in Louisiana require some education after high school, primarily at a four-year college or at a two-year technical and community college. This is a change from jobs of generations past. In 2011, 28 percent of the Louisiana workforce had a two- or four-year degree. To meet Louisiana’s future job needs, that number must double.

In part, this gap is because our own academic expectations do not correspond with the job need. While a score of “mastery” or level four out of five denotes readiness to complete at least a year of technical college or university on time, in our state “basic” or level three out of five has been accepted as a mark of full readiness. The transition to higher expectations is, at its essence, a transition from “basic” to “mastery” as the bedrock academic expectation.

* **When is Louisiana transitioning to the use of CCSS?**

Louisiana is using the standards in all classrooms this year, as part of year four of the five-year gradual transition plan. State assessments (LEAP, iLEAP, EOC) assess the standards.

* **Why does Louisiana need transition policies related to implementation of CCSS?**

The standards and related assessments reflect increased expectations for our students and educators. Thus, it is critical that we give educators and students time to learn the new expectations without undue consequences. Moreover, Louisiana needs to determine its new “baseline” of performance using the new standards and assessments; this baseline is used for accountability policy development at all levels – district, school, educator and student.

* **What is the state’s long-term goal, and how does it relate to the CCSS transition?**

By 2025, an “A” school in Louisiana will be one where the average student scores mastery or 4 out of 5 on the state assessment – indicating true college and career readiness. By comparison, an “A” school in Louisiana today is one where the average student scores basic or a 3 out of 5 on the current state assessment.

According to the proposed transition plan, educators and students will take the next two years (13-14 and 14-15) to learn the new expectations. In 2015, student scores on PARCC will be used as the baseline for accountability to determine the appropriate timeline for raising the bar in order to meet the 2025 goal.

**Testing**

* **When and how are the state tests changing?**

The state tests are fully aligned with CCSS for the 13-14 school year, though they do not assess the full rigor of the standards. In 14-15, Louisiana students in grade 3-8 will take the PARCC tests, and high school students will continue taking state-made, Common Core-aligned end-of-course exams.

* **Will high schools use PARCC?**

High schools will not take PARCC tests in 14-15. Instead, high school students will continue to participate in the ACT series and Common Core-aligned end-of-course exams.

The Department of Education is working on a comprehensive high school transition proposal with educators in the coming months.

* **Will PARCC tests be administered online?**

Schools can administer the 3rd and 4th grade tests with pencil and paper in 2015. However, schools can administer the tests online if they choose to do so. The 5th-8th grade tests will be administered online; however, schools that lack the technological capabilities, as determined by a PARCC technology simulation, can apply for a waiver.

In 15-16, students in grades 3 to 8 will be assessed online.

**School and District Accountability**

* **Will schools continue to receive letter grades during the transition years (13-14 and 14-15)?** Yes
* **During the transition period (13-14 and 14-15), will the grades be calculated in the same way as they were in 2012-2013?**

The School Performance Scores will be calculated per policy, but the letter grade will be assigned on a curve.

* **Given that the tests are getting harder, how will we ensure that school letter grades will not drop precipitously in 13-14?**

To ensure consistency in the system and to allow educators time to learn the new expectations, letter grades will be awarded based on a curve in 13-14 and 14-15. The curve will be determined using the 12-13 distribution. For example, if 10 percent of schools earned an “A” in 12-13, the top 10 percent of schools would earn an “A” in 13-14 and in 14-15.

The Louisiana Accountability Commission will consider policy related to the specifics of this curve no later than January 2014.

* **Can a school change letter grades from 12-13 to 13-14 and 14-15?** Yes. As with prior years, schools’ individual letter grades may go up and down, but the curve will ensure the overall distribution remains constant.
* **How can a school determine whether it improved or declined if letter grades are curved?**

The School Performance Scores and assessment results will provide a clear picture of growth or decline.

* **Can a school still earn “Top Gains” during the transition?**

Yes. The Louisiana Accountability Commission will consider policy regarding this issue no later than January 2014.

* **Will the K-8 school performance score still include the school-level value-added bonus?**

Yes. The state will produce school-level value-added data, but not teacher-level value-added data.

* **Will district letter grades also be curved in 13-14 and 14-15?** Yes.

**Teacher Accountability**

* **Will the Compass evaluation system continue in 13-14 and 14-15?**

Yes. All teachers will receive feedback from their principal and an official evaluation.

* **Will the state produce teacher-level value-added data (VAM) in 13-14 and 14-15?** No.
* **Why won’t the state produce teacher-level VAM results during the transition?**

As the tests change, it is important to build in time to assess and understand shifts in student and teacher performance. Thus, teacher-level value-added data will not be available for two years while the tests are changing.

* **What student growth data will be available this year?**

Instead of teacher-level value-added data, transitional student growth data will be available this year. Details on this data, including when it will be available and what data points it will include, will be shared in mid-December.

* **Will transitional student growth data be a part of the Compass evaluation process?**

While evaluators may take transitional student growth data into account when assigning a teacher's student outcomes score, there is no requirement to do so.  Local school systems may develop rules or policies to guide the use of this data.

* **Will student growth data be verified and included in the Compass Information System (CIS)?**

Yes. In order to produce transitional student growth data, teachers and principals must verify rosters in the CVR portal. Transitional student growth data will be available in CIS.

In mid-December, the Department will provide guidance on when this data will be available.

**Student Accountability**

* **How will schools determine whether to promote students in 4th grade over the next two years?**

Schools always determine student promotion based on grades, attendance, etc. However, the state also has rules regarding the LEAP scores a student must earn in order to progress to 5th grade, as outlined in Bulletin 1566. These rules will not change. However, for the next two years, districts will be given more flexibility to make decisions based on additional academic indicators beyond the LEAP test as the state transitions to the new assessments

At the end of the 13-14 school year, if a district feels a 4th grade student who does not earn “passing” scores on the LEAP is academically ready to move to 5th grade based on their performance throughout the year, the district can apply for a waiver from the state. At the end of the 14-15 school year, due to a delay in test scores resulting from the administration of new assessments, all promotion decisions for 4th grade students shall be made according to a district’s pupil progression plan.

* **What criteria might a district use in determining promotion for students who do not pass the LEAP test in 4th grade?**

Districts may elect to use promotion criteria similar to what is used for grades that are not high stakes testing years, including but not limited to performance on classroom assignments or benchmark assessments.

* **How will the 8th grade promotion standard change, as it relates to passage of the LEAP test?**

Starting with the 13-14 school year, the 8th grade test-passage retention standard will become a remedial standard. Students who do not pass the LEAP in 8th grade may receive remediation at the high school in a transitional ninth grade instead of being retained on the middle school campus. This will provide students both the academic support they need to continue to progress to high school and the ability to learn with their peers.

* **Will transitional 9th graders count toward the high school SPS?**

Transitional 9th graders will not be counted in the high school’s cohort graduation rate in the first year. However, if the students take any end-of-course exams, then the results will count toward the high school SPS. Also, the credits earned by transitional 9th graders will be included in the “sending” middle school’s dropout/credit accumulation index.

Specifics of these policies will be considered by the Accountability Commission no later than January 2014.

* **Why are these rules changing?**

This change will ensure that 4th grade students who, through no fault of their own, did not receive the instruction needed to achieve a passing score on the 4th grade assessment are not harmed during the transition.

This change also will provide for improved outcomes with 8th grade students, as they are provided additional academic support in a more suitable learning environment.

* **Do students who fail the LEAP test need to attend summer school and take the summer retest?**

In 13-14, students who fail the LEAP test may be promoted to 5th grade or moved to the transitional 9th grade only after attending summer school and taking the summer LEAP retest.

In 14-15, PARCC results will not yet be released. Thus, school districts should set their own criteria to determine who must attend summer school.

**Technology**

* **Are students going to take the PARCC tests online?**

Given feedback from educators around the state, Louisiana will make a gradual transition to online testing. In 14-15, as a default, students in grades 3 and 4 will be taking paper and pencil tests, and students in grades 5, 6, 7 and 8 will be taking tests online.

However, following a fall 2014 "dry run" of technology systems, districts may request that other grade levels be administered paper tests if technology systems are not yet ready for PARCC administration for the spring 2015 administration.

Similarly, if a school is ready to administer 3rd and 4th grade assessments online in 14-15, they may do so.

All schools will administer PARCC online in all grades (3 to 8) by 15-16.

* **How can I know if a school is ready?**

Beginning in spring 2014, the Department will release a set of diagnostic tools to help districts determine if they have adequate bandwidth, infrastructure, and devices to be ready for the PARCC tests. In addition, in fall 2014, the Department will hold a PARCC technology simulation day. This day will allow districts to simulate the complete test environment and determine what adjustments may be necessary prior to the actual test.

* **How will the state determine if a school qualifies for a one-year technology waiver for 5th-8th grade testing?**

Additional guidance regarding the criteria for technology waiver will be issued in the coming months.

**Curriculum**

* **What curricular support has the Department provided for educators?**

The Department has provided an online [Classroom Support Toolbox](http://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/classroom-support-toolbox) that contains many curricular resources, including long-term plans, unit plans, assessment guidance, and instructional videos. Additional resources are added monthly. Additionally, over 2,000 Teacher Leaders have and continue to receive training in order to provide direct support at their school sites during this transition.

* **What new curricular supports will be offered for 14-15?**

By January, the Department will begin releasing [reviewed curricula and assessment resources](http://www.louisianabelieves.com/academics/2013-2014-math-and-english-language-arts-instructional-materials-review/curricular-resources-annotated-reviews), and by spring 2014, the Department will release a Louisiana Curriculum Guidebook for both ELA and math. Additionally, throughout the spring more toolbox resources (unit plans, instructional videos, and supplemental resources) will be released and ongoing training for Teacher Leaders will continue. Might incorporate the guidebook language he’s using.