RESPONSE TO ACT 364
# OF THE 2015 REGULAR SESSION

REQUIREMENTS OF THE ACT

Act 364 (HB 844) of the 2015 Regular Legislative Session requires that the state board shall designate the 2015-2016 school year as an academic learning year in which a three-level rating system, not to be based on letter grades nor used for consequences, shall be used to create practice performance profiles for publicly funded sites and the community networks in which they are included. The state board and the state Department of Education shall specify in public communication that any ratings assigned during the 2015-2016 school year are practice ratings for the academic learning year. The state board shall submit a written report on the progress of the academic learning year to the House and Senate Committees on Education not later than forty-five days prior to the beginning of the 2016 Regular Session of the Legislature.

BACKGROUND: THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION NETWORK

Louisiana is currently in a multi-year effort to unify its early childhood system and improve kindergarten readiness. To address a fragmented early childhood system that prepares too few children for kindergarten, Louisiana passed a law (Act 3, 2012) charging the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to unify preschool, Head Start and child care programs into a statewide early childhood network. By empowering families with choice and ensuring easy access to high-quality options, the State seeks to have every child on track for success.

In implementing this law, the Louisiana Department of Education, under the leadership of BESE, established an ambitious and achievable plan to create local early childhood networks comprised of child care, Head Start, publicly-funded private preschools, and public school pre-kindergarten under a unified system of academic and development standards, enrollment, and teacher preparation expectations. These local networks, which are expected to serve all publicly funded at-risk children from birth to age five, are implementing innovative approaches to increasing quality and improving access, as now required by BESE Bulletin 140. Each community network functions as a consortium of early learning providers, with a Lead Agency serving as fiscal agent. As a consortium, they are expected to:

- **Lead Collaboratively**: Develop a collaborative leadership structure that represents child care, Head Start, public preschool and nonpublic preschool leaders;
- **Support Teachers**:
  - Observe and provide feedback to teachers using a highly-regarded, research-based tool (*CLASS*) and ensure teachers have access to evidence-based professional development;
  - Use an assessment to evaluate all children; and
- **Coordinate Enrollment**: Coordinate information and applications across all programs for families.

Pilot Cohort 1
Pilot Cohort 2
Pilot Cohort 3
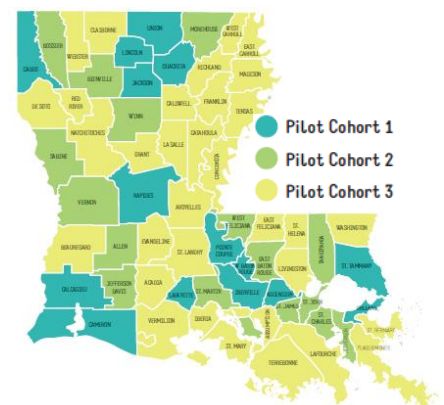
The centerpiece of these efforts is a unified quality rating and improvement system for child care, Head Start, public and nonpublic PreK. The rating and improvement system is built around the importance of high-quality teacher-child interactions, which the State is measuring with the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)*. Research demonstrates that children in classrooms with higher *CLASS* scores have improved outcomes. For the first time in Louisiana, all publicly funded programs are focusing on the same quality work in their classrooms and having their quality measured in the same way, through *CLASS*.

All of this work is further supported by the recent integration of Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) programs into the Department from the Department of Children and Family Services. With the oversight of BESE, the Department now directly manages and operates child care, public and non-public preschool programs and sets licensing and performance expectations for Head Start programs. This adds to BESE's oversight of early childhood, with BESE already allocating early childhood funding through LA 4, NSECD (nonpublic program), 8(g), and now the child care assistance program (CCAP).

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION NETWORK

In June 2015, BESE promulgated Bulletin 140 in order to fully implement the Early Childhood Care and Education Network by the start of the 2015-2016 school year as required by Act 3 (2012). The purpose of Bulletin 140 is to establish the duties and responsibilities of the Early Childhood Care and Education Network, local community networks and community network lead agencies, define kindergarten readiness, and create a uniform assessment and accountability system for publicly-funded early childhood care and education sites and community networks that includes a performance profile indicative of performance (§101).

PERFORMANCE RATINGS
Young children learn through relationships with adults. By responding to children's emotions, engaging them in stimulating activities and using conversation to help them learn concepts and connect ideas, adults prepare children to thrive. Thus, the key factors that determine the quality of an early childhood classroom are the interactions and instruction that take place within that classroom.

The state is measuring the quality of teacher-child interactions with the nationally regarded, research-based *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)*. *CLASS* is organized around domains as shown in Table 1, which reflect the key interactions and instructional elements needed for quality early childhood classrooms. Each domain is measured on a 1 to 7 point scale. Ratings for sites and Community Networks, as well as non-rated informational items, will be reported publicly in an annual performance profile.

Table 1: Overview of *CLASS* Domains

Description	PreK Domain	Toddler Domain
Create a warm, positive environment and build trusting relationships with children	Emotional Support	Emotional & Behavioral Support
Organize daily routines, keep children engaged in activities and minimize disruptions	Classroom Organization	
Help children learn concepts and connect ideas through dialogue and play	Instructional Support	Engaged Support for Learning

Sites: The performance rating for sites is based on the domain level results from *CLASS* according to the scale shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Site Performance Rating Scale

Rating	Score
Excellent	6.0 – 7.0
Proficient	3.0 – 5.99
Needs Improvement	1.0 – 2.99

Each domain will be rated separately and the site will be rated overall based on all the aggregate domain results.

Community Networks: The performance rating for community networks is based on two measures: 1) *CLASS* results and 2) access for four-year-olds. Fifty percent of the rating is based on domain level results from *CLASS* and 50 percent on access for at risk four-year-olds. The *CLASS* results measure will be based on the aggregate domain results from all sites that are part of the network. The access measure is based on the percentage of at-risk four-year-olds served within the community network, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Access Rating for Community Networks

Percentage of At-Risk Four-Year-Olds Served	Points
95 - 100%	7
90 - 94.9%	6
85 - 85.9%	5
80 – 84.9%	4
75 – 79.9%	3
70 – 74.9%	2
0 – 69.9%	1

The overall community network will be rated according to the scale shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Network Performance Rating Scale

Rating	Score
Excellent	6.0 – 7.0
Proficient	3.0 – 5.99
Needs Improvement	1.0 – 2.99

LEARNING YEAR RESULTS: FALL 2015 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As measured at the midyear point in the 2015-2016 year, local communities in Louisiana have made great progress in implementing unified systems that help prepare all children for kindergarten.

➢ 100 percent of Louisiana communities have a functioning, unified early childhood community network with a lead agency in place.

- More than 98 percent of classrooms have been observed in a consistent manner using a shared tool, providing leaders, teachers and stakeholders with unparalleled insight into what young children are experiencing in early childhood classrooms. This information will enable the state to make more informed policy, leaders to better plan professional development and support teachers and families to choose the best option for their children.
- Initial *CLASS* results indicate that children in Louisiana benefit from warm, positive classroom environments considered medium to high quality. Classrooms were assessed as medium quality on indicators related to behavior management, regard for children's perspectives and engagement of children in activities. But in the average Louisiana toddler or PreK classroom, instruction is of low quality. There are too few learning moments. Questions are rote or non-existent and children are not asked to explain their thinking. Children receive little, if any, feedback and are not encouraged to connect concepts and ideas. Overall, there are too few opportunities for children to build and strengthen their skills, especially the critical language and cognitive skills.
- Local networks have broken down silos to coordinate enrollment processes, making it easier for families to apply and for programs to plan effectively.

The following section provides more detail on these results.

LEARNING YEAR RESULTS: DETAIL ON FALL 2015 RESULTS

This report provides more detail on the preliminary results from the fall semester of the Learning Year. Since the Learning Year continues through June 2016, no final or fully audited results are available at this time.

ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS TO-DATE
In the first semester of the Learning Year, Lead Agencies have made significant progress on coordinated observation and coordinated enrollment. Their work spanned planning for observations, conducting observations, reporting preliminary results, and developing their enrollment plans and first ever coordinated request for funding.

Planning Jointly for the Learning Year
The department and Lead Agencies have collaborated through multiple forums to prepare for the Learning Year. The Department launched weekly office hours to address questions and provide support. In addition, Lead Agencies attended a series of webinars on implementing Bulletin 140 and meeting expectations.

- **Result**: Nearly 95 percent of Lead Agencies attended in-person regional collaborative meetings in September and November.

Completing *CLASS* Observations
Lead Agencies began the Learning Year by identifying reliable *CLASS* observers for both PreK and toddler classrooms, producing a robust observation plan in September 2015, and using a new, online system for *CLASS* observation reporting and analysis in October 2015.

Lead Agencies were required to demonstrate how they would ensure the accuracy of their observations by:
- Requiring all observers to be certified reliable by Teachstone, the national organization that oversees *CLASS*;
- Conducting "shadow-scoring" or double coding of at least 10 percent of observations conducted; and
- Developing and administering internal protocols for maintaining inter-rater reliability, assuring accuracy, minimizing conflict of interest, and maintaining records of all observations.

100 percent of Lead Agencies submitted observation plans in which they described the approach that would work best in their community. This included training and deploying existing staff, collaborating with program partners and/or contracting outside individuals.

As a result of this thoughtful planning and execution:

- **Result**: 5,408 PreK and Toddler classrooms were observed in the fall. This represents 98 percent of publicly-funded classrooms.
- **Result**: 45 of 64 community networks completed 100 percent of their local observations in the fall, an additional 14 community networks completed between 95 – 99 percent of their local observations.
- **Result**: Initial results indicate medium quality average scores for PreK Emotional Support, PreK Classroom Organization and Toddler Emotional and Behavioral Support Domains. In instructional areas, however, the results indicate much lower quality for PreK Instructional Support and Toddler Engaged Support for Learning. Overall, this indicates that the quality of instruction is low in Louisiana PreK and toddler classrooms. Too few children in Louisiana are provided with opportunities to build and strengthen their skills, especially the critical language and cognitive skills. Note that these are preliminary results that are still being verified. The Department will report more in-depth results in spring 2016.

Auditing *CLASS* Observations
Based on national best practice and input from stakeholders, the Department is auditing local *CLASS* observations in the Learning Year. The Department conducted a competitive process to identify an independent vendor to complete *CLASS* observations at every publicly funded early childhood site in Louisiana. As part of this process, vendors had to demonstrate detailed procedures on how they would ensure the accuracy of all observations.

In July 2015, the Department established a contract with a well-regarded third party contractor, the University of Louisiana Lafayette – Picard Center, to conduct nearly 3,000 independent *CLASS* observations, including at least one at every site in Louisiana. ULL-Picard has a long history of supporting quality early childhood in Louisiana and is currently led by a national expert on *CLASS*. In addition, the contract requires them to ensure:
- All observers are certified reliable by Teachstone, the national organization that oversees *CLASS*;
- "Shadow-scoring" or double coding is completed for at least 10 percent of observations conducted;
- Observers participate in quarterly training and recalibration sessions;
- At least 5 percent of all observations are reviewed internally; and
- There are strict internal protocols on conflict of interest and maintenance of records of all observations.

As a result of this competitive process:

➤ **Result:** ULL-Picard finished the fall ahead of schedule completing 1,584 observations (45 percent of contract)

Supporting Coordinated Enrollment

The fall began with community networks completing their second annual self-assessment on their progress in developing a coordinated enrollment system. Bulletin 140 indicates that all cohort 1 and cohort 2 community networks achieve full coordination during the 2015-2016 school year. Cohort 3 must make partial progress, with full coordination by 2016-2017. To support communities, the Department hosted a series of webinars in the fall and then provided in-person technical assistance to cohort 3 community networks. Each cohort will launch its enrollment system in the spring.

➤ **Result:** 100 percent of community networks completed self-assessment, showing 90% had improved year-over-year
➤ **Result:** 94 percent of cohort 1 and 2 community networks have completed coordinated enrollment plans
➤ **Result:** 97 percent of cohort 3 community networks have completed coordinated enrollment plans *(1 outstanding)*

Submitting a Coordinated Request for Funding

To further unify the early childhood system and maximize access for families, communities are now working together to look at all available funding sources and locations to serve young children. In the Learning Year, communities will for the first time submit one request for funding to the Department that covers a new pilot for child care assistance, LA 4 PreK, non-public PreK (NSECD), and the preschool expansion grant.

➤ **Result:** 98 percent of community networks submitted a coordinated funding request (*1 outstanding*)

UPCOMING IN THE LEARNING YEAR

The spring semester of the Learning Year will bring additional data points to guide the continued development of a unified, high-quality early childhood system. Below are some key milestones for the remainder of the Learning Year.

- **January – May 2016**: Spring *CLASS* observation period
- **February – June 2016:** Communities conduct coordinated enrollment
- **February 2016:** Department releases Planning Guides to assist community networks to begin preparing for 2016-2017
- **March 2016**: BESE reviews coordinated funding requests for 2016-2017 and sets allocations for pilot child care assistance program, LA 4, NSECD, and preschool expansion grant classrooms
- **April 2016**: Department shares additional findings from *CLASS* results and conducts public roadshow for feedback on revisions to the early childhood rating and improvement system
- **May 2016**: Early Childhood Care and Education Advisory Council considers revisions to Bulletin 140
- **June 2016**: BESE considers revisions to Bulletin 140 and funding for child care improvement resources

- **June-August 2016:** Networks and programs will certify data from the 2015-2016 academic year
- **July 2016**: Department releases additional guidance on Bulletin 140 for 2016-2017 academic year
- **Fall 2016**: Practice performance profiles will be released after extensive engagement with community networks and program partners

CONCLUSION

As measured at the midyear point in the 2015-2016 year, local communities in Louisiana have made great progress in implementing unified systems that help prepare all children for kindergarten.

- ➢ 100 percent of Louisiana communities have a functioning, unified early childhood community network with a lead agency in place.
- ➢ More than 98 percent of classrooms have been observed in a consistent manner using a shared tool, providing leaders, teachers and stakeholders with unparalleled insight into what young children are experiencing in early childhood classrooms. This information will enable the state to make more informed policy, leaders to better plan professional development and support teachers and families to choose the best option for their children.
- ➢ Initial *CLASS* results indicate that children in Louisiana benefit from warm, positive classroom environments considered medium to high quality. Classrooms were assessed as medium quality on indicators related to behavior management, regard for children's perspectives and engagement of children in activities. But in the average Louisiana toddler or PreK classroom, instruction is of low quality. There are too few learning moments. Questions are rote or non-existent and children are not asked to explain their thinking. Children receive little, if any, feedback and are not encouraged to connect concepts and ideas. Overall, there are too few opportunities for children to build and strengthen their skills, especially the critical language and cognitive skills.
- ➢ Local networks have broken down silos to coordinate enrollment processes, making it easier for families to apply and for programs to plan effectively.

Under BESE's leadership, the Department will continue to work with local community networks to complete the remaining milestones for the Learning Year.