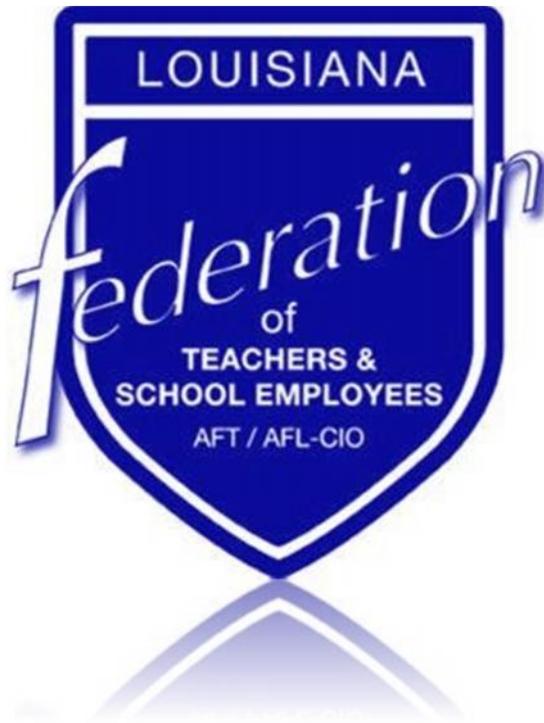


# 2018 Legislative Agenda



**“The goal of the public educational system is to provide learning environments and experiences, at all stages of human development, that are humane, just and designed to promote excellence in order that every individual may be afforded an equal opportunity to develop to his full potential.”**

**Louisiana State Constitution, Article 8, Preamble**

# “It is Up to Us”

**The connection between each of us *and* to an annual legislative agenda must be our shared mission and values.**

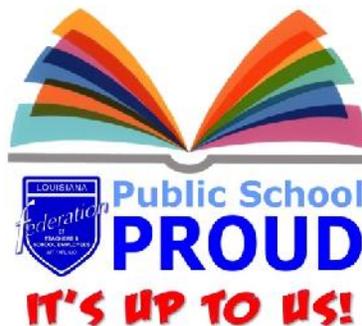
The Louisiana Federation of Teachers’ primary mission is to advocate for quality public education for all Louisiana students while protecting and advancing the profession of those individuals who dedicate their lives to Louisiana’s students. Education is of and for people and vital to the health of our communities and our nation.

What had always formed the foundation of this Federation’s mission since its chartering found clear expression in simple form at a special emergency convention in January 2006. As Louisiana survived two devastating hurricanes, so did LFT and from that experience was borne this expression of the LFT’s value-based vision:

- A fierce commitment to **FAIRNESS** for students, teachers, school employees, and higher education faculty
- An unbending quest for **ACCESS** for students, teachers, school employees, and higher education faculty
- A no-compromise commitment to equal **OPPORTUNITY** for students and educators at every level to achieve success
- A belief in 360-degree **ACCOUNTABILITY** that is not limited to students and teachers

**Our policy agenda and strategic engagement plan center around the most important tenants of reclaiming the promise of public education:**

- Creating safe, welcoming places;
- Cultivating well-prepared and supported teachers and staff;
- Developing engaging curriculum; and
- Ensuring wraparound services that address students’ social, health and emotional needs.



Louisiana Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO  
 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Convnetion - Shreveport  
 Larry Carter, President  
 Cynthia Posey, Legislative and Political Director

**In 2007**, the Federation aligned its convention committees with our organization’s broad agenda. The five permanent convention committees are: 1. Compensation Excellence, 2. Retirement, Healthcare, and Benefits, 3. Employee Rights, 4. Education Funding, and 5. Education Policy.

The resolutions adopted by delegates each year help to shape our legislative agenda and *continue to impact future legislative efforts as Standing Resolutions* until the stated objective is accomplished or the issue is otherwise resolved.

## Compensation Excellence

“**It is up to us**” to make a formal commitment to compensation excellence for Louisiana teachers, school support workers, and higher education faculties --- for compensation that is *nationally competitive*. The true path to educational excellence in Louisiana begins with excellent compensation that helps to recruit and retain the very best professional educators and staff. We will to oppose the statutory requirement that local salary schedules ignore or diminish the value of experience, LFT will advocate for compensation models that leave no employee behind.

As LFT continues to push for nationally competitive salaries, it must also confront roadblocks to excellent compensation that exist at the state and local level. In 2018, we expect to face yet another Special Session prior to the 2018 Regular Legislative Session. Legislators will be forced to pick up the “can” of fiscal irresponsibility they have been kicking down the road. LFT will continue to advocate for

K-12 education to be one of the highest funding priorities for state and local governments.

**Teacher Effectiveness Pay.** Act 1 (2012) and Act 54 (2010) together required districts to develop new salary schedules, forcing districts to ignore or diminish the value of experience and advanced degrees and mandated that competency and for compensation be tied to a flawed evaluation system.

In 2013 the legislature authorized a one-time payment to local districts that gave one time raises to certified classroom teachers.

In 2014, LFT successfully made that raise a permanent part of the base funding for K-12 Education. 2016 saw LFT working with then Representative John Bel Edwards to fund the public education outside of the MFP ensuring that raises granted to school personnel would be maintained. However, some districts are not complying with the mandate that those raises be continued through local salary schedules.

LFT will work to make sure that salary schedules reflect that permanent funding. Changes in 2012 also gave school districts the choice of increasing base

salaries or providing one-time stipends. Some districts have tied the one-time stipend to salary steps, requiring the teacher to return to the district to receive payment for a benefit they have already earned. LFT will seek legislation requiring districts to pay the effectiveness stipend within 30 days of receiving their rating.

**Certified Personnel in All Schools.** The promise of public education will only be fulfilled when highly qualified, certified teachers lead every classroom. LFT will continue to work to undo policies allowing charter schools to operate with 0% certified teachers.

**Fair Wage for Support Employees.** Support employees are not invisible, dispensable workers. They contribute to their schools and the welfare of the children. LFT recognizes the value in their work and will work to ensure a fair and living wage for them.

In the 2018 Legislative session, LFT will work to have physical contact pay for school employees extended to one year providing uniformity and fairness for all.

## **Retirement, Healthcare, and Benefit Protection**

“It is up to us” to defend the promise made to public workers of a retirement with dignified and fair benefits. In Louisiana, teachers, school employees and college faculty belong to the Teachers Retirement

System of Louisiana or the Louisiana School Employees Retirement System. These systems provide Louisiana’s public-school employees a defined retirement benefit, along with other options aimed at providing for retirement. LFT will work to protect retirement benefits of teachers, school employees, and higher education faculty, without reducing benefits for future employees. However --- make no mistake about it --- the attacks on public employee pensions have been unrelenting and are not expected to abate any time soon.

Despite many years of unfounded attacks on our retirement systems, in 2017 Louisiana’s retirement systems were again ranked in the top five retirements systems in the country by the PEW Trust and continue to be one of larger economic drivers in Louisiana. LFT will continue to *provide solutions* to keep our public employee retirement system healthy and sustainable for years to come and prevent retirement benefits of teachers, school employees, and higher education faculty from being sold to wall street.

**GPO and WEP.** After years of dedicated service compensated by a humble paycheck, many employees working in lower-wage jobs, like teachers, school workers, and state employees are negatively affected by the calculation characteristics of the WEP and the GPO, and suffer a disproportionately negative effect on their retirement benefit.

The Louisiana Federation of Teachers and School Employees will request that the Legislature of Louisiana memorialize the United States Congress to

take such actions as are necessary to review the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision Social Security benefit reductions and to consider eliminating them.

**Effective Oversight and Responsible Management of the Office of Group Benefits.** Over half of Louisiana’s school districts offer health insurance to their employees through OGB. Sadly, the once plentiful fund balance of OGB was spent down by Jindal to fill budget gaps created by unsound fiscal policies. LFT has been engaged in a vigorous fight to protect access to affordable healthcare, ensure greater oversight and legislation requiring annual actuarial studies. We will continue to work with Governor Edwards for additional oversight of OGB, including the restoration of authority to approve or deny plan changes by the OGB policy and planning board, and for the financial health of OGB so that it can continue to provide affordable, high-quality healthcare access to its members who dedicate their lives to public service.

**Protection of Defined Benefit Plans.** LFT will continue to support defined benefit options for all of Louisiana’s public education employees. Because most educators will not enjoy social security, public employee retirement systems are the only option.

**Cost of Living Adjustments for Retirees (COLAs).** LFT is committed to fighting for regular cost of living adjustments for Louisiana’s retired public education employees and supporting the local economy, which

ultimately must be strong to grow strong schools. LFT will also oppose efforts to limit the ability of systems to pay COLAs by prohibiting the systems from making contributions to the experience account, the account from which COLAs are to be paid.

## Employee Rights

**“It is up to us”** to reclaim the promise of public education which requires reinstating essential liberties in the school environment as we educate the citizens of tomorrow. Teachers, school employees, and higher education faculty are all public employees. As public employees, all policy regarding their employment is set by a public body—a local school board, the state legislature, the Board of Regents, BESE, or one of the university system boards of trustees. LFT and its local affiliates will continue to advocate for fairness for all public employees.

**Public Employee Bargaining.** LFT believes that the right to organize and the right to collective bargaining are issues of social justice and carry with them distinct advantages for students, teachers, school employees, college faculty and the community as a whole. LFT will continue to seek the statutory right for public education employees to decide whether or not they want to enter into a bargaining relationship with their respective employers.

**Use of Payroll Deductions.** For six consecutive years, big business interests attacked employee rights

to pay their union dues from their hard-earned paycheck, attempting to prohibit payroll deductions for such a purpose. While the First Amendment protects political speech, some policymakers hope to end the existence of our organization and to silence public employees by preventing the payment of dues by payroll deduction or by limiting the purposes for which those dues may be used. LFT will continue to oppose any effort to interfere with how its members choose to spend their hard-earned paychecks.

**PSRP Break Time.** In Louisiana, there are no laws regarding the allowance of paraprofessional rest periods. Currently rest periods and breaks are granted by the Local Education Authority. Sadly, districts unknowingly and knowingly and willingly deny their employees break periods. LFT will work to have districts conform with OSHA Standards and have districts allow school employees to have a rest period of a minimum of 15 minutes for each three and one-half hours worked.

**Sick/Sabbatical Leave.** LFT worked to remove the financial exigencies excuse, under which school districts could deny sick and sabbatical leave. Additionally, the first mandatory sick leave bank policies and paid maternity leave policies were instituted with support from LFT. Now, as we continue to protect extended sick leave, LFT will advocate for better local and state policies regarding donation to newly established sick leave banks, sabbatical leave, and family medical leave.

**Tenure.** Tenure was created to ensure that highly qualified, experienced classroom educators would never fall victim to arbitrary termination. Tenure is intended to be insurance against arbitrary or political attacks on our best teachers to ensure they stay where they belong, in the classroom. In 2014, LFT successfully passed drastic improvements to the Tenure Hearing process. But, there is much more work to be done.

**Evaluation.** Effective school systems use data to inform instruction, not as a “scarlet number” that does nothing to improve teaching and learning. In 2016, LFT worked to pass SB 262 which extended a moratorium on linking evaluations to the consequential results of teacher evaluations, school letter grades and the promotion of fourth-grade students. In 2017, we will see the true effects of reform efforts as the moratorium ends. LFT will work to ensure that all teachers have due process rights and are treated as professionals. We will oppose the further linking of our unfair system of evaluation and fixation on testing to teacher pay, tenure, and reductions in force. LFT will continue to put forth policy that improves the process by which Student Learning Targets are developed and implemented, and the process by which teachers and school employees are observed by their evaluators, building in much needed due process at key points in those processes.

**Role of the Paraprofessional.** LFT recognizes the importance of the paraprofessional in the education of

Louisiana's children and will seek legislation supporting their role in the education process, advocating for just and fair treatment of this important group and celebrate the crucial role they play in the education community.

## Education Funding

**“It is up to us”** to protect education funding from those who want to take away education dollars, money needed to give our children the education they need and deserve, to cover years of irresponsible and morally bankrupt fiscal policies. Louisiana faces an over \$1billion deficit because lawmakers refused to work with Governor John Bel Edwards to find the balance needed to put our state on sound financial footing.

In 2017, LFT fought back a proposal to cut the MFP by \$29 million in the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Session. On the MFP Taskforce, LFT voted to increase the MFP by the 2.75%, but BESE and the Louisiana Department of Education choose to send a standstill per pupil formula to the Legislature for the ninth year in a row. During the last two years, k-12 education has lost over \$44 million while funding for vouchers and scholarships to private schools were increased. LFT advocated and will continue to advocate for tax reforms that are fair, progressive, and will ensure long-term revenue stability and fully fund public education needs.

In 2018, there will be more attempts to take away constitutionally and statutorily dedicated funds and to give the legislature control of the MFP. These education funds were voted into the constitution by the citizens of Louisiana to provide for the education of our children.

By starving public schools, proponents of privatization have manufactured a crisis regarding the quality of public schools. They have used this crisis to support their case for vouchers and charters, leading to further defunding of public schools. We need to make our case for protecting, and increasing public education funding heard loud and clear at the Capitol.

**Funding the True Cost of Education.** In 2013 LFT successfully fought for a seat on a reconstituted MFP Task Force and has served in that capacity ever since. Louisiana's current funding mechanism for elementary and secondary education is historically based on student enrollment and is inevitably determined based upon the amount of revenue the state has, and not the amount of money actually needed to educate students. Costs of personnel benefits, new technology, and implementing the myriad of so-called reforms are piling up, but our state hasn't provided additional funds to help local districts meet these demands. LFT will advocate for full funding of state-mandated programs and costs, and continue to educate policymakers regarding the true cost of providing high-quality public education. Specifically, LFT will continue to advocate for

funding of new mandates, including the costs of retirement and healthcare to be included in the MFP.

**Components of an Equitable MFP.** The MFP is a constitutionally protected source of funding for K-12 funding which originates in the form of a recommendation made by BESE regarding a per-pupil funding amount. LFT will continue to advocate for the **rejection of an MFP that:**

- does not represent a true calculation of costs associated with education
- incentivizes misdiagnosis of special needs
- funds gifted and talented education based on students' test performance
- inequitably funds technical education as another way to cut the state's commitment to our career and technical colleges, or to replace proven, successful technical education programs with unproven ones proposed by private interests
- fails to acknowledge the portion of the MFP being allocated for retirement costs and other state unfunded mandates including stipends for certified personnel.

**Infrastructure.** While the law currently requires the inspection and evaluation of public school campuses by the state on an annual basis, this inspection has not been completed in a truly systematic way in decades. Considering the growing needs for infrastructure and technology improvements to properly administer currently mandated standardized tests, LFT will continue to fight to make infrastructure a part of a comprehensive school evaluation system and will support efforts to develop the best learning environments for our students.

**School District Fragmentation.** Across the nation, financially-strapped school systems are consolidating with adjoining districts to achieve an economy of scale. However, Louisiana is witnessing a reversal of this trend, with some areas seeking separation from their parish school districts to establish school systems with municipal boundaries. LFT believes that this “balkanization” of districts diverts much-needed resources from educating the children of Louisiana, and LFT will press for a stop to further splintering of districts.

**State Funding for Higher Education.** The Legislature has cut funding to higher education institutions by 39% since 2008, the third largest proportional cut of the 50 states and the largest dollar cut per student in the nation. Tuition has increased 80% over the same period, the second largest increase among states, effectively putting a tax on the future of Louisiana's college students. LFT will continue to advocate for funding that does not make college impossibly expensive, and for policies that make our state a true financial partner with parents and students as we invest in our people.

## Education Policy

**“It is up to us”** to push for policies that are grounded firmly in the belief that schools are more than brick and mortar, policy which focuses on their development as a tool for community-wide prosperity. From curriculum to discipline, the

Louisiana Legislature, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Board of Regents and the various university systems of trustees all enact statute and policy affecting the delivery of public education from pre-kindergarten to graduate school, along with the professions of teachers, school employees, and higher education faculty. Reclaiming the promise of public education means redeveloping a focus on community schools to ensure that they are at the core of all policy decisions.

**Observations and Learning Targets that Reflect Fairness for Students and Teachers.**

As the evaluation process continues to evolve, and educators continue to fight for increased rights to due process, we also seek to impact the policies that shape the types of goals set for our students. LFT will continue to work for basic components in the observation and SLT process that assist student and teachers in demonstrating progress and learning including improved interactions with evaluators both before and after the observations, and SLT's are completed. We will fight for the principle that evaluation results, delivered in a relevant timeframe, should inform the quality of instruction and must be shaped so that they provide valuable feedback, not a distraction from the process of teaching and learning.

**Implementation of an ESSA Framework.** Sound policymaking requires setting out methods of implementation that will support our public institutions, not merely setting a demanding standard

of excellence with no regard for the means required to attain that standard. The US Congress passed new laws that will replace No Child Left Behind (NCLB) with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In 2017, we saw Louisiana's ESSA Plan submitted without adopting meaningful stakeholder input and without the approval of the governor. ESSA had the potential to ensure that every public school could be a place where parents want to send their children, where students are engaged, where educators want to work and to free our children from overused high stakes testing.

As it stands now, in Louisiana, the ESSA plan will allow the State Superintendent of Education and the BESE Board, with the help of Betsy DeVos, to continue their attacks on public education and the people who work every day to make sure our children receive the education they deserve. LFT will continue to advocate for the resources, training, and education needed to meet the goals set for educators and students, while also working to ensure that the standards set by our policymakers represent healthy, valid goals.

Additionally, LFT will oppose policy decisions that are driven primarily by test obsession, which lead to heartbreaking consequences for our students and deprive us of our professionalism leaving us without the freedom to truly teach.

**Returning the Joy to Learning.** As test obsession, lack of resources and professional burnout fuel the mass exodus of the teaching profession, LFT vows to

continue to work for the basic components of high-quality education that create better citizens for the future. That includes wraparound services, provision of proper nutrition, and time to learn the social skills that all people need to be productive members of society. Simple measures, like ensuring that recess is a component of the school day, and ensuring that students have time to eat and enjoy the nutritious food served in the schools across our state are vital parts of this effort.

**Rulemaking Oversight.** BESE promulgates rules to carry out the policy mandates of the Legislature. Over the past year, LFT has brought to the attention of BESE, and the Department of Education various ways in which it has exceeded or misapplied its rulemaking authority under the Administrative Procedures Act. LFT will continue to seek remedies to restore transparency in the process of policymaking at the administrative rule-making level.

**School Letter Grades.** The method for calculating School Letter Grades has frequently changed without any legislative oversight. LFT will continue to advocate for measures of school performance that truly empower parents with information that provides an accurate assessment of our schools and which respectfully acknowledges and accounts for the unique challenges to student success in each community. Such a system should apply to any school receiving state funds.

**Accountability for Public Funding.** LFT will support proper accountability for all local and state

revenues appropriated for education in Louisiana. That means more than just a statement about rigorous standards. Traditional public schools, new charter authorizers, public charter schools, non-public schools receiving public dollars through vouchers, and course providers should all be subject to across the board standards for certification of personnel, curriculum, and facilities. Accreditation of non-public schools should not replace the need for state approval, nor should it supplant any part of the approval process.

Furthermore, every child deserves a school that is fairly and accurately assessed. Therefore, schools that enroll fewer children, that do not grant diplomas, or don't teach key tested grades must not be excused from any accountability standards or state approval processes. As the money "follows the child" so should the oversight of public dollars. This will require efforts to enhance policy in the legislature, BESE, and at the local level.

**Poverty as an Obstacle to Student Growth.** LFT will support measures that attempt to recognize and measure the ways that poverty impacts student achievement. Only an accurate picture of student health and welfare will produce the best strategies for improving student achievement. Integrating these finding and strategies into school letter grades, and teacher evaluations is another important step towards serving all children regardless of their socioeconomic background. LFT will advocate for holistic

approaches to student welfare that address the whole student, and therefore, all the obstacles to learning.

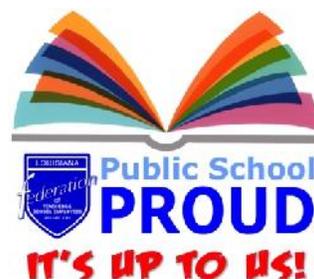
**Wraparound Services as a Key to Success.**

Recognizing that healthy children gain the most from the promise of public education, LFT will continue to explore and support methods to bring better primary health care to Louisiana students at their schools, provide for proper nutrition, as well as access to proper diagnostic services so that the needs of all of Louisiana's children can be properly assessed and met.

Specifically, LFT will support a community action school model that improves health outcomes and academic achievement for students by developing community investments in student health services. For example, by working to maintain and increase reimbursements for services to Louisiana children enrolled in Medicaid, and by advocating for continued funding for nationally board-certified diagnosticians, LFT can play an active role in ensuring that high-quality healthcare is a staple of every public school.

**In Closing . . .**

A legislative agenda is not a wish list. Rather, it is a strategy to address short and long-term issues within the context of the LFT's overarching mission and core beliefs. In 2018, LFT will work to reclaim the promise of public education for our students and communities, for our members and our profession... "IT IS UP TO US"!



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