



From the Desk of the Executive Director



Dr. Sujuan Boutté

In May we celebrate State Employee Recognition Week. While it is wonderful to set aside a week to recognize our employees it is critical to understand the ongoing impact they have on the effectiveness of the state programs we operate.

"If employees truly are a company's best asset, then their care and support should be a priority."

Gallup Business Journal January 7, 2014

Gallup has performed extensive research on the power of Employee Engagement. Their studies consistently show strong correlations between employee engagement and performance. These correlations are consistent across different types of organizations and regions of the world. As you can see from the chart below Engaged Employees are the heartbeat of effective organizations and teams.



Gallup Business Journal January 7, 2014

This issue is dedicated to the members of the LOSFA Program Team who consistently demonstrate the power of being engaged while promoting and providing college access to the students and families we proudly serve.

How engaged are they?

We asked our employees to finish the following sentence: "In my daily work here at LOSFA, I help students and families succeed by..."

- Providing guidance, support and approval for initiatives that promote and provide college access.
- Doing my best to resolve TOPS payment issues in a timely and complete fashion.

continued on page 2

In this edition. . .

<i>From the Executive Director's Desk</i>	<i>1 -3</i>	<i>Pizza Party Celebration Pictures</i>	<i>6-7</i>
<i>GEAR UP Success Story</i>	<i>3-4</i>	<i>Mentoring Students to Success</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Louisiana FAFSA Completion Increases</i>	<i>4-5</i>	<i>Louisiana GEAR UP Day at the Capitol</i>	<i>8-9</i>
<i>Compete to Complete Winners</i>	<i>6</i>		

From the Desk of the Executive Director (continued)

- Making sure that they can fund their post-secondary institution of choice.
- Providing post-secondary career guidance.
- Assisting students with matching their skills and interests to pursue the post-secondary education, and the career of their dreams.
- Clarifying and closing the gaps in the college access process.
- Encouraging parental involvement which can lead to significant gains in the student's achievement.
- Doing my best to enable our support staff to provide accurate and timely information to LOSFA program staff to provide the very best information and service to the people of Louisiana and others in the postsecondary education community and our partners in both Federal and state government.
- Building tools that help students keep track of their financial aid options.
- Using teamwork to do what it takes to provide a seamless experience for students to gain college access.
- Using the best tools we can find to provide support on a timely basis so the LOSFA programs support staff can assist the people in need of help.
- Assisting schools with billing for LOSFA programs so that students are able to receive their scholarship and grant funding timely.
- Providing excellent customer service to all of our clients, both internal and external, and assisting the LOSFA programs in any way that we can to enable them to reach the goals of the agency.
- Processing "behind the scene" financial accounting reports for decision making.
- Listening to concerns and taking the appropriate steps towards resolution.
- Getting their TOPS back because of unforeseen circumstances.
- Helping to recruit and retain the best employees to serve the public.
- Providing college access, career and financial literacy information that will ultimately prepare them for future success.
- Exploring different postsecondary options with them. No two students or families have the same circumstances, so it's important that they know all of the options available to them and that we can work with everyone on their own unique journeys.
- Being an advocate for students and families and being a resource that they know and can count on.
- Being an intricate part of the synergy that LOSFA has created to ensure that every possible solution is executed timely creating effective and efficient results.
- Being available to assist them with any questions or concerns regarding the financial aid application and award process.
- Making sure payments are sent to the schools in a timely manner on behalf of the students.
- Giving excellent customer service in providing assistance and information in opening new START accounts and the benefits of them.
- Taking their START payments and applying it to the right account numbers and getting them ready for the college life.
- Accurately and efficiently processing their paperwork and payments.
- Utilizing counseling to simplify the process of using a 529 account to completely cover or assist with rising college expenses.
- Providing Account Owners the help and assistance needed by processing START Disbursement Requests in a timely manner in order for the beneficiary of the account to attend school for Higher Education.

continued on page 3

From the Desk of the Executive Director (continued)

- Using the power of social media to inform them of the resources and information available to help them prepare for college. In addition to that, I also help them succeed by providing them with answers to any college preparation and success questions asked through our text messaging program.
- Providing a clear interpretation of the requirements to receive the benefits of the programs we administer.
- Providing excellent customer service in reference to saving for college goals and making sure deposits received are accurately processed in a timely manner.
- Providing help and information about different pathways to access post-secondary education.
- Providing accurate and timely financial information to internal and external stakeholders.
- Taking the time to fully explain terms and processes that may seem daunting and overwhelming for students and parents going through the financial aid process for the first time.
- Processing financial assistance documents to educational institutions as effectively, efficiently, and expediently as possible to ensure that her/his enrollment experience is successful.
- Helping to enhance their knowledge and awareness of the many post-secondary options and resources available to further pursue educational and career endeavors..."Teaching the child, not just the subject matter."
- Diligently working through the college and career readiness process and address students and family concerns.
- Providing administrative support and structure on college and career access options.
- Making every effort to support their needs and provide timely and accurate information.
- Taking my commitment and service wherever I go!
- Providing technical support for LOSFA staff in assisting the community in meeting their desire for higher education.
- Making sure the students' voices are heard.
- Ensuring that they obtain all of the information they need to be successful in pursuing a post-secondary education.
- Coordinating events and conferences for students and their parents.

Hats off to the folks that serve our students and families! Read on to see the difference their engagement makes.

Best,
S.

Louisiana GEAR UP Helped Get Me to College. Now, I'm Graduating!

My name is Ni'Gena Brooks, and I am currently a senior at Louisiana State University. On May 12, 2017, I will be graduating from LSU, and Louisiana GEAR UP played a large role in getting me here.

Before attending Louisiana State University, I was a senior at Bastrop High. It was at Bastrop High School that I became involved in Louisiana GEAR UP, and that is when its influence in my education began.



First, as a first generation student, I could not call on my family to help me fill out my college applications.

continued on page 4

GEAR UP Success Story: Ni'Gena Brooks (continued)



However, my GEAR UP Coordinator, Ms. Yabut, and my English teacher, Mrs. Quinn, helped me complete my college applications.

In addition to having an on-site coordinator to help students complete college applications, GEAR UP held a day dedicated to helping students complete their college applications as a part of LCAM, Louisiana College Application Month. During the event, students were assisted with completing

their college applications, and Louisiana GEAR UP even paid college application fees for eligible students.

Next, Louisiana GEAR UP sponsored campus tours for students to experience what it felt like to be on an actual college campus. For me, I visited the campus of Louisiana State University, and that's when I fell in love with the campus. Initially, I was unsure if I wanted to attend the university, but the tour changed that.

In addition to assisting with my college applications and providing me with a campus tour, Louisiana GEAR UP helped to prepare me for life as an actual college student in the GEAR UP Alumni Leadership Academy (GUALA) after graduating from high school. Through this program, I learned how to better lead, network, and advocate for Louisiana GEAR UP.

After I graduate this month, I would like to give back to a program that played such a big part in my education. Because I can attest to the influence of Louisiana GEAR UP, I look forward to seeing the success of other LA GEAR UP students like me who will attend and complete college.

Louisiana FAFSA Completion Rates Reach Record High; LOSFA and Partners Continue Initiatives across State

The Louisiana Department of Education recently announced that the FAFSA completion rate for the state of Louisiana has reached a record high. More than half of Louisiana's seniors have already completed the FAFSA, which stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid. More FAFSAs are expected to be completed as there is more than a month remaining until the priority deadline of June 30, 2017. By then, the state's Department of Education is projecting the rate to match or exceed the national completion rate of 55 percent. The department is crediting several nationwide and statewide changes for the record-breaking rate including events and initiatives that have been held as a part of the City of Baton Rouge's Compete to Complete Campaign.

Compete to Complete Campaign for the City of Baton Rouge

The City of Baton Rouge was awarded the FAFSA Challenge Grant by NCAN last summer. The grant, which is funded by the Kresge Foundation, is intended to help selected cities raise their FAFSA completion rates by at least 5 percent. LOSFA and its partners have set an even higher goal of at least a 10 percent growth increase in the FAFSA completion rate. Since then, LOSFA and its partners have been hosting innovative events and initiatives such as the FAFSA Tournament and school concentration events. In addition to the FAFSA completion events held during the school year,

continued on page 5

Louisiana FAFSA Completion Rates (continued)

LOSFA and its partners will be hosting events in both May and June to assist parents and students with FAFSA completion. In fact, throughout both months, parents and students will be able to schedule an appointment to complete the application at our FAFSA Lab, which is located in our office in downtown Baton Rouge. Another initiative taking place in June will be the 2017 FAFSA Block Party at the East Baton Rouge Parish Main Library to target parents and students who need to complete or correct their FAFSA before the priority deadline of June 30, 2017.

Students and parents have greatly appreciated these FAFSA completion events and initiatives held by LOSFA and its partners. For the students of public high schools in Baton Rouge, completing the FAFSA has

additional incentives for them. Each month, students with completed applications are entered into drawings for prizes such as graduation supply vouchers from Josten's and Krispy Kreme and McDonald's gift cards. In addition to the individual prizes, students have been competing against students at other high schools to win class pizza parties. To date, Baton Rouge Magnet High School (October), Northeast High School (November), Belaire High School (December; February), Mentorship Academy (January), Glen Oaks High School (March) and Woodlawn High School (April) have had the highest completion rates or growth rates for their respective months. For the month of May, there will be several grand prize winners to conclude the overall competition.



Above: Darius Spurlock, Juterh Nmah, and Timene Thomas of LOSFA smile as they serve pizza, dessert, and drinks to Baton Rouge Magnet High School seniors at their pizza party on April 13, 2017.

Right: Glen Oaks High School seniors Jolesia Ard and Mishonda Polk, smile for a picture after enjoying their senior class pizza party. Both of them have completed their FAFSAs and are excited to begin their journeys to becoming nurses in the fall.



Izzy Reyes, a LOSFA Near Peer Coordinator, talks with Baton Rouge High student Chloe Ditsa about college choices.



Compete to Complete Campaign Winners for March and April



Congratulations to Glen Oaks High School for winning the Compete to Complete Challenge for March 2017!

Congratulations to Woodlawn High School for winning the Compete to Complete Challenge for April 2017!

Pizza Party Celebrations

Each monthly winner of the Compete to Complete Campaign received a pizza party for their senior class. Below and continued on the next page are some photos of the pizza parties at the different schools.



Pizza Party Celebrations (continued)



Mentoring Students to Success

The fruits of mentoring are far-reaching and everlasting for both the mentors and the mentees. Mentees gain guidance, self-confidence, improved interpersonal skills, and hope that they will possess and share for the rest of their lives. For some like Terrence Carlin, mentoring is a “blessing.” Currently a senior at Dutchtown High School, Terrence Carlin needed guidance in navigating his future. Thus, Khristopher Hobbs, Darius Spurlock, Brittani Williams and Oscar McClain of LOSFA Field Outreach Services held a mentoring session with Terrence to provide advice and guidance about his future. During the session, the LFOS staff discussed high school success, post-secondary options, and future aspirations. As for Terrence’s future aspirations, Terrence plans to attend Physical Therapy school. Before he does that, he will attend River Parish Community College and then transfer to a 4-year university, where he will study Kinesiology.

After receiving guidance and discussing his future plans with the LOSFA staff, Terrence expressed how thankful he was for their visit, “I appreciate all that you have done for me, and I am very confident in my [future] choices. This event was a blessing. I can’t thank you all any more than I already have. My plan is rock solid due to the help of this meeting.”



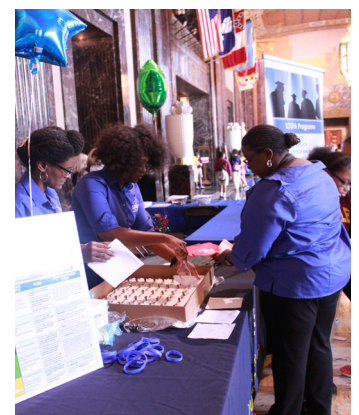
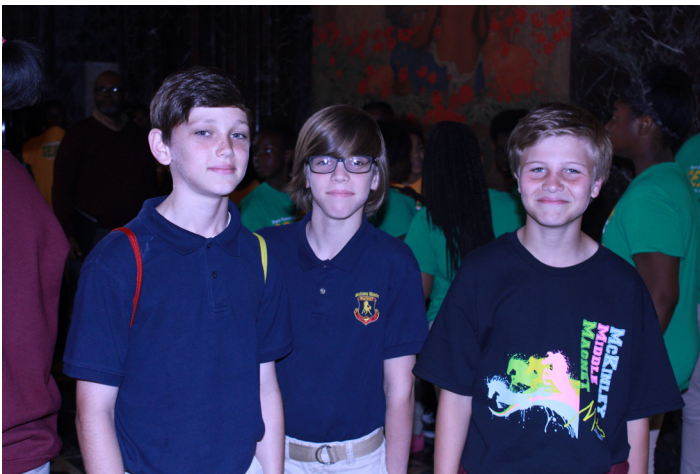
Right: Dutchtown High School student Terrence Carlin talks with LOSFA mentoring staff Oscar McClain, Darius Spurlock and Khristopher Hobbs about future plans for college and career majors. Left: Oscar McClain, Terrence Carlin, Khristopher Hobbs and Darius Spurlock celebrate the friendship that is fostered through the mentoring program.

Louisiana GEAR UP Day at the Capitol

April 26, 2017 was declared Louisiana GEAR UP Day at the Louisiana State Capitol by Governor John Bel Edwards. Two schools, Park Forest Middle and McKinley Middle Magent, from the current GEAR UP grant attended the event. Students learned more about GEAR UP, took a tour of the capitol, and staff talked to visitors at the capitol about the Louisiana GEAR UP program.



Louisiana GEAR UP Day at the Capitol (continued)



LOSFA's Social Media Sites



<http://www.facebook.com/LOSFA>



<http://www.twitter.com/LOSFA>



<http://www.youtube.com/LOSFA1000>



<http://instagram.com/LOSFA001>



For more information, contact the
Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance
A program under The Board of Regents

By Phone: 800-259-5626

By E-mail: custserv@la.gov

By Mail: P.O. Box 91202,
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-9202

Web Address: www.osfa.la.gov



For submissions, opinions, or comments for the LOSFA LOOP, please
contact Gus Wales at Gus.Wales@la.gov.