

## From the Desk of the Interim Executive Director



Dr. Sujuan Boutté

Remember that Nat King Cole song—"Roll out those lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer..."? Okay, some of us remember that song ☺ One thing we know for certain is that whomever wrote the lyrics (actually it was Hans Bradtke, Hans Carste and Charles Tobias), was definitely not working in the field of financial aid or college access! The songwriters get partial credit on the hazy, crazy part but the lazy...well that refers to folks we don't know.

One thing about that song that I can definitely agree with is that our team here at LOSFA has indeed been rolling out! Our folks are super busy preparing for and conducting programs, traveling to observe those programs, conducting presentations and crunching the numbers to get award amounts and allocations out to our partners in financial aid. As one who has the privilege of leading such an accomplished team, I am taking the unabashed liberty to brag about some of what we're up to ☺

Happy 20th Anniversary wishes are in order for our Trailblazer Program! Our Public Information Staff is buzzing with the activity that leads up to this year's camps. Not many agencies can boast about peer mentoring preparation programs that have been in existence for this long so join us in smiling as we gaze back at past camps on pages 4-6! Last year our Trailblazers provided the input that we based the Louisiana Connect Mobile App on...remember you heard it here! This year they will be beta testing the actual app!!! How about that for the speed of college access ☺

Our GEAR UP team members are also rolling out-on a national scale. As I write, our own Timenee Thomas is returning from Washington, D.C. where she attended GUALA, serving as Louisiana's representative in the amazing inaugural class of 30 GEAR UP Alumni Leaders. GUALA stands for the GEAR UP Alumni Leadership Academy at the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP). You can read more about Timenee's story on page 8, and at <http://lagearup.com/guala/>.

Our GEAR UP team is also busy getting ready to attend the national GEAR UP conference where our own GEAR UP Director, Shannon Domingue scored not one but two presentation slots. As if that weren't enough: One of the coolest features of this conference is the GEAR UP Youth Congress. LOSFA is fortunate to have 4 outstanding GEAR UP students attending this year. Reading their stories and comments makes you feel good about the hard work we are all doing to prepare our future leaders. We hear so much about the negative, it's refreshing to see the positive through the eyes of the students we serve. But don't just take my word for it...check out "In Their Own Words". I'm betting you'll smile with pride as you read it.

...And oh yeah, the lazy is totally allowed during the 4th of July Weekend!!

Best of summer to you-  
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## Louisiana Connect College Access and Career Planning Portal Exhibits 573 Percent Rate of Growth in Student Users

The Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) today released the Louisiana Connect college access and career planning Web portal ([www.louisianaconnect.org](http://www.louisianaconnect.org)) user data collected during the 2012-2013 school year, which illustrates the growth within all user groups, highlighted by a 573 percent increase in student users.

"We are extremely pleased with the phenomenal rate of growth the Louisiana Connect portal has demonstrated," said LOSFA Interim Executive Director Dr. Sujuan W. Boulté. "These user figures validate our belief that, when made aware of the tools contained within the portal, both students and parents readily recognize the benefits it offers," she added.

The Louisiana Connect portal provides tools and resources to help students plan for life after high school, find colleges where they can be successful, and launch rewarding careers. Louisiana Connect also provides professional school counselors, parents, teachers and advisors with a full suite of tracking dashboards, reporting capabilities, and communication tools to help students navigate the process.

In August 2012 the portal had a total of 20,971 users. By the end of the school year (May 2013) the portal user total was 131,445.

When viewed by user groups, the 10-month growth of the Louisiana Connect portal included a 573 percent increase in student users, a 373 percent increase in parent user accounts, and a 62 percent increase in educators (counselors and teachers).

The rate of growth can be attributed to many factors, including the launch of the Individual Graduation Plan (IGP) and TOPS Progress Tracker tools within the portal as well as the addition of on-demand videos, new and improved user guides, and a streamlining of the processes used to import data for schools.

In addition to the growth in user numbers, the number of recruiting messages sent from Louisiana college partners to students via the Student Recruit feature in the Louisiana Connect portal during the same time period increased by 29 percent.

The Louisiana Connect college access and career planning portal allows students to:

- Connect with colleges and universities that are a match for their educational and career goals
- Learn about careers and connect with employers
- Find scholarships and other programs designed to help the student

succeed

- Access an exclusive News Feed and Event Planner
- Build a profile to highlight individual skills and achievements
- Learn how a college education can be affordable
- Compare costs and academic offerings from various in and out of state schools

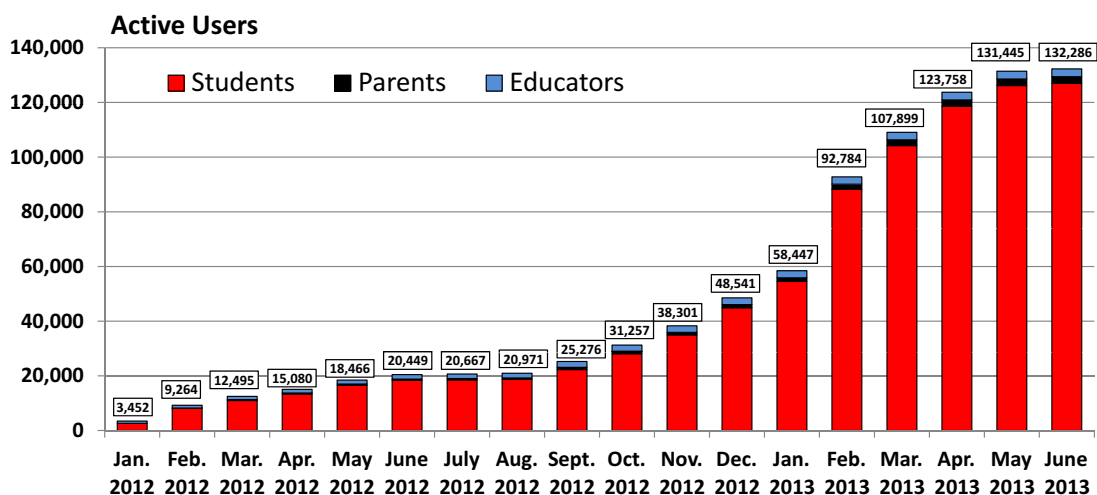
Other Louisiana Connect portal highlights include:

- Integration of state-mandated Individual Graduation Plan
- Louisiana Department of Education student data loaded into the web portal, prepopulating student profiles, and driving college, scholarship and career matching
- Guided college searching, matching and comparison tools
- Scholarship Searching & Matching, including the ability for counselors to upload local scholarships
- Career Exploration & Planning: Including interest, Skills & Values assessments mapped to occupation profiles, internships, and career planning strategies
- Dashboards & Reporting: Featuring resources that empower counselors to help students stay on track to graduate and to earn targeted scholarships and grants

In addition, LOSFA is working with numerous college access organizations, including Gear-Up and TRiO programs, and community organizations throughout the state to participate and alert students through the portal of various opportunities and events that will assist with postsecondary education preparation and financing.

Future portal enhancements that are in various stages of development include:

- Integration of Louisiana Connect with the Louisiana Workforce Commission's Star Jobs Web site
- The development, in partnership with Board of Regents, The Louisiana Department of Education and the Louisiana Workforce Commission of public landing pages that will provide valuable college access and financing resources to populations without active Louisiana Connect accounts including adult-learners who are returning to school or seeking career makeovers and families with students younger than 8th grade
- The development of a Louisiana Connect smart phone application that will be beta tested this summer.



The June 2013 data is as of 6/26/2013.

## TOPS Rule Changes

At its June 20, 2013 meeting, the Executive Committee of the Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission approved Emergency Rules and Notice of Intent that implement Acts 140 and 359 of the 2013 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature.

**Act 140 –** Expands the list of high schools from which students may graduate and participate in TOPS to include high schools located outside of Louisiana that are authorized to offer an International Baccalaureate Diploma when the student graduates with such a diploma in 2009-2010 or later.

**Act 359 –**

a. Revises the calculation of the TOPS Cumulative Grade Point Average for students graduating in 2017-2018 and thereafter to provide that Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Gifted and Dual Enrollment courses used to complete the TOPS Core Curriculum are calculated on a 5.00 scale. All other required TOPS core courses will continue to be calculated on a 4.00 scale.

**Note:** This new grading scale will be used for students entering the ninth grade in 2014-15 and thereafter.

b. Revises the TOPS core curriculum to change the courses required to qualify for a TOPS Opportunity, Performance, or Honors award for students graduating in 2017-2018 and thereafter.

**Notes:**

1. Students graduating through 2016-17 will use the existing TOPS Core Curriculum.
2. The new TOPS Core Curriculum will be used for students entering the ninth grade in 2014-15 and thereafter.

The TOPS Progress Tracker in Louisiana Connect will display the student's progress toward completing the required TOPS Core Curriculum courses. As required TOPS Core curriculum courses are successfully completed, they will be added to the TOPS Progress Tracker listing and the number of remaining core units needed for TOPS qualification will be updated.

The TOPS Progress Tracker will also display:

- The student's highest ACT score (or SAT equivalent score) on record
- The student's current TOPS Core GPA
- The TOPS award that the student is currently on track to receive

**See the charts below for the courses added to or removed from the TOPS Core Curriculum.**

Courses Added to the TOPS Core Curriculum By Act 359	
AP Japanese Language and Culture AP Latin (Replaces AP Latin: Vergil) AP Macroeconomics AP Microeconomics AP Physics I and AP Physics II Economics	Government IB Theatre I IB Economics IB Further Mathematics HL IB Geography IB Mathematics

Deleted By Act 359	Notes	Deleted By Act 359	Notes
Algebra I, Parts 1 and 2	Former Equivalent	Applied Mathematics III	-
Anatomy and Physiology	Former Equivalent	Chemistry Com	Former Equivalent
AP American Government	<i>No longer offered</i>	Civics and Free Enterprise (1 unit)	<i>No longer offered</i>
AP French Literature	<i>No longer offered</i>	Discrete Mathematics	Former Equivalent
AP Latin Literature	<i>No longer offered</i>	IB Biology III	-
AP Latin: Vergil	<i>No longer offered</i>	Integrated Science	-
AP Spanish Literature	-	Physics for Technology	-
Applied Algebra 1A and 1B	-	Physics II	-
Applied Algebra I	-	Studio art as a general category	-
Applied Geometry	Former Equivalent	Visual art as a general category	-
Applied Mathematics I and II	-		



LOSFA Director of Public Information and Communications Gus Wales is pictured with USA Funds Senior Program Officer Kyle Malone at the 2013 College Goal Sunday Forum in Scottsdale, Arizona. Malone will also be the keynote speaker at the Louisiana College Application Week Luncheon on July 11, 2013. High schools participating in the Louisiana GEAR UP program will serve as a pilot population for the first year's implementation of a College Application Week program. The ultimate goal is to offer access to the program and materials developed in the pilot program to all high schools in the State.



## A Look Back at 19 Years of Trailblazer Camps

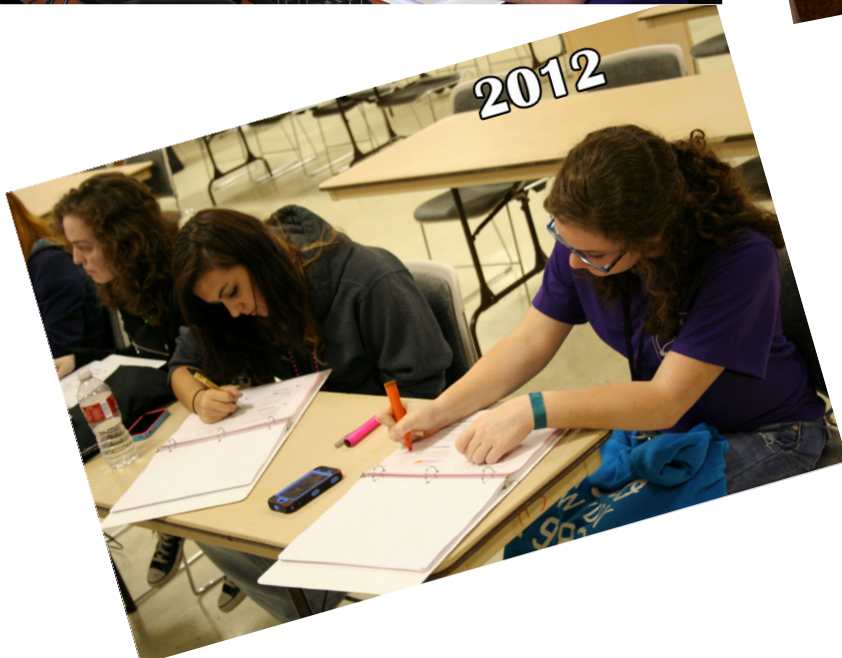
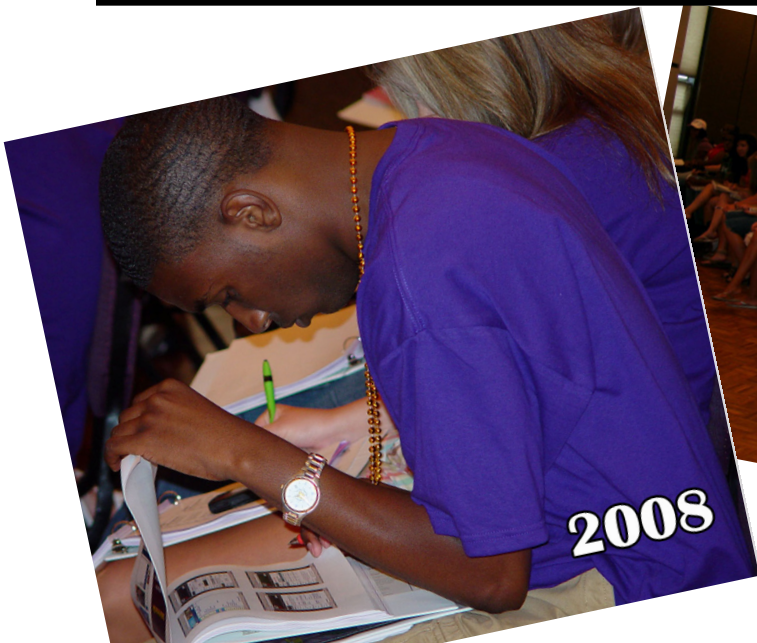
This summer, LOSFA will host the 20th installment of its Trailblazer Camp. Below are a few of our favorite moments from the first 19 years of camps!













## Timenee Thomas Represents LA GEAR UP at GUALA

Ms. Timenee Thomas, Louisiana GEAR UP alumna, was selected to attend the GEAR UP Leadership Alumni Academy (GUALA) in Washington D.C. from June 22-29, 2013. The GUALA is, "...a new initiative launched by the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP) with support from the national GEAR UP community and funding from The Kresge Foundation. The GUALA is a 12-month program designed to train and engage GEAR UP alumni in advocacy and leadership, and work toward creating positive change in education policy for their younger peers."

At the GUALA, Ms. Thomas had the opportunity to meet and visit with staff from the offices of both Senator David Vitter and Representative Bill Cassidy. Additionally, Ms. Thomas was one of four alumni leaders chosen to accompany Representative Chaka Fattah, Representative Rubén Hinojosa, and NCCEP President/CEO Nathan Monell in briefing Members of Congress and their staffs regarding

the impact of GEAR UP on low-income and underrepresented youth across the country.

Also while in Washington D.C., Ms. Thomas and the other 29 alumni leaders toured the White House, engaged in advocacy and leadership training, and worked to establish a nationwide network of young leaders for education.



*At the Lyndon Baines Johnson Building, headquarters of the U.S. Department of Education, Timenee Thomas spoke on behalf of a roundtable group, which included Department of Education and NCCEP staff. Topics discussed during the roundtable were parental involvement, college/career access and professional development as connected to the GEAR UP experience.*

## LA GEAR UP: In Their Own Words...

*Timenee Thomas was asked to contribute a blog post following her experience at the GEAR UP Leadership Academy. Below is what Thomas contributed.*

Just...WOW!

GUALA!! \*in my voice\* No clue where to start, so I'll just go with it. It is only Monday, and this experience has been absolutely uplifting. I did not know, nor did I think, that there were so many other GEAR UP alumni who remotely possessed this same passion that I do about this program. To have the opportunity to meet with others from across the country is a reward in itself! Not only that, but our leaders,

speakers, presenters, and all of those who are working with us on this project are encouraging, focused individuals. They are guiding us and providing us with so many TOOLS (shout out to Mr. Johnnie Williams III) necessary to continue the support of this great initiative. I am honored to have them all as mentors so that I can go back to my home state with motivating energy for Louisiana GEAR UP!

THANK YOU to: Ms. Judy Martinez, Mr. Daniel Bremer, Ms. Diane Charles

So, as we say in LA, Laissez les bon temps rouler! :)

*NCCEP's Youth Congress is a youth leadership program that implements a student-focused curriculum, blending leadership development with life skills and strategies for increased learning. This year, four LA GEAR UP students were chosen to attend. Below are excerpts from their Youth Congress applications.*

- Since I've started high school I've realized nothing is going to be handed over. In middle school there was a poetry club, but in high school sports are more important: Our school set aside Fine Arts for "pig skin and plastic pads". Therefore, I fought. I have advocated for other student poets in my school and myself because no one believed we mattered, but we do. We have a chance! There are so many opportunities ahead for us like, creative writing degrees in which we all are interested, but how do we get there? I have led us students this far, but I would like more guidance and to grow as a leader for this school to get to the next level. I do not want these students to drop the ball because our school isn't making plays for us. I am a leader!

- I love helping others in my community and being that person that someone may need to listen to them and understand them. My future is very important to me. I plan on being a Pediatric Surgeon so that I could help children live a better life and experience things that other children are experiencing; and also get rewarded with

opportunities to show just who they are and what they are capable of doing. I refuse to back down from anything; I will work to my best ability to get to where I need/want to be.

- LA GEAR UP has helped me to recognize my leadership potential. I have always been a go getter, and at times I can come across as pushy or a little bossy. But, with LA GEAR UP, it has helped me to be a motivator in a more positive way without the bossy undertone. Also I have always wanted to go to college but I never thought it was possible. In my family it is not uncommon for people to drop out of high school, and to go to college is unheard of. Without the support of family it seemed to be impossible. Now I know the sky is my limit and nothing and no one can stop me.

- LA GEAR UP and the Explorers Club have helped me to achieve things that I never thought were possible. I was nominated by LA GEAR UP at the 2011 State LA GEAR UP Conference to represent LA GEAR UP on the Louisiana Legislative Youth Advisory Council (LLYAC). I have served as a LLYAC alternate member, full member and Vice President of the Council. I represented the 5th Congressional District of Louisiana. This year I served as a Senior Advisor to the Council. I also received a Commendation from the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Louisiana for my service on the LLYAC.

# 3 ways to receive notification of your TOPS status:

Processing for 2013 high school graduates awaiting their initial TOPS award began the first week of June. Processing will continue weekly until all eligible students are awarded.

Three ways to  
receive notification  
of your  
TOPS Status!



For more information,  
please contact the  
Louisiana Office of Student  
Financial Assistance (LOSFA)  
at 1-800-259-5626 or  
e-mail [custserv@la.gov](mailto:custserv@la.gov).

## 1

Create an account on the Louisiana Connect Portal:  
**<http://www.osfa.la.gov/louisianaconnect>**

*Once you have an account on the Louisiana Connect portal you can provide a mobile telephone number in order to receive a text message once your TOPS status has been determined.*

## 2

Create an account on the Louisiana Award System:  
**<https://www.osfa.la.gov/AwardSystem>**

*Once you have an account on the Louisiana Award System you can check your account at anytime for your TOPS status.*

## 3

*Wait to receive notification via United States mail.*



## LOSFA's Social Media Sites



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



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



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



[www.Flickr.com/LOSFA](http://www.Flickr.com/LOSFA)



For more information, contact the  
Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance:

By Phone: 800-259-5626

By E-mail: [custserv@la.gov](mailto:custserv@la.gov)

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

Web Address: [www.osfa.la.gov](http://www.osfa.la.gov)

For submissions, opinions, or comments for LOSFA LOOP, please  
contact Gus Wales at [Gus.Wales@la.gov](mailto:Gus.Wales@la.gov).