

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1804

January 18, 2012

The Honorable Bobby Jindal
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 94004
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9004

Dear Governor Jindal:

Your successful reelection bid and subsequent announcement that improving K-12 education is at the top of your second-term agenda will provide a significant lift to the efforts already underway in our state. I understand that your focus for "next generation" reform will include enhanced teacher quality, expanded school choice, and flexible spending at the local level. In pursuing these goals, I encourage you to consider a few complementary areas of importance as we work together to substantially improve educational outcomes for all of Louisiana's children, close the achievement gap prevalent in too many of our schools, and unify our state behind these efforts.

Studies show that raising the quality and effectiveness of instructional leaders is key, and that we must identify, support and retain the best and brightest, recruit new talent, and replace ineffective teachers. To enhance teacher quality, I believe we must consider the importance of teacher preparation and training. Louisiana has been a national leader in assessing its teacher preparation programs. Now, by using that assessment data and investing in high-quality, university-based models, as well as proven alternative preparation programs like Troops to Teachers and Teach For America, Louisiana can build on this accomplishment and produce a first-class teaching workforce.

As an enthusiastic proponent of public school choice and the Co-chair of the U.S. Senate Public Charter School Caucus, I too believe we must provide our families with greater freedom to choose the best educational fit for each student. I encourage you to meet this objective by growing the number of high-quality public charter schools throughout the state when and where traditional systems fail to perform. This approach has the advantage of retaining public resources in the public system of education, while also opening up more quality choices for parents. Research shows quality public charter schools promote healthy competition and improve student outcomes. According to a 2011 study by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes, nearly 50 percent of the open-enrollment public charter schools in Orleans Parish performed significantly better than their traditional public school counterparts in reading, math, or both. As we work to expand school choice, we must also identify local assets and invest in homegrown talent to lead charter schools in Orleans Parish and across the state. Our schools are more likely to succeed when they are embraced and supported by the neighborhoods and communities they serve.

I look forward to learning the details of your stated third goal: increasing flexibility in local education spending. We should expand the use of student-based budgeting and school site management to bring as many financial resources as possible directly to the classroom. Providing principals with budget authority and more control over hiring and firing of all school personnel with proper safeguards aligns with our push for accountability and empowerment. By giving principals the flexibility they need to allocate resources effectively and efficiently, they will have more leverage

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to raise student achievement, enhance teamwork among the teaching faculty, and encourage more parental participation.

As you begin your second term, it is my hope that you and your staff will also carefully review the current disparities in school funding across the state. The most recent per pupil expenditure data provided by the Louisiana Department of Education reveal that there are significant differences in the funding districts make available to support schools. In the 2009-10 academic year, for instance, Iberville Parish spent approximately \$20,500 per student while West Carroll Parish and Avoyelles Parish spent only \$9,000 per student. Our state must take a close look at Louisiana's per pupil revenue and expenditure data, and consider ways to ensure equity among districts, so that our claim that every child has an equal chance to succeed is in fact a reality. Cities and parishes with limited opportunities to raise revenues cannot do this alone. I encourage you to consider all options to secure the additional funding necessary to respond to these disparities.

Additionally, I hope you will continue to emphasize and invest in early childhood education and development programs, which serve as the foundation for all of the above. I urge you to consider local, state, nonprofit, and federal funding that could be directed toward a coordinated public-private effort to prepare all of our children to be ready to learn by kindergarten.

And finally, the condition of our school buildings is deplorable and requires immediate attention. Louisiana is one of only seven states that fail to dedicate state funding for the maintenance, repair, or construction of its public schools. According to a back-of-the-envelope calculation by the 21st Century School Fund, our state has a backlog of deferred school capital needs that totals roughly \$3.5 billion. I believe the state has a responsibility to ensure that all children learn in 21st century schools with building facilities and grounds that match our high expectations of them. I urge you to consider how your Administration can address this pressing need.

Thank you for making these issues a priority in your Administration. I look forward to working with you, the Legislature, and the BESE board members to promote positive outcomes in our state's education system.

Sincerely,



Mary L. Landrieu
United States Senator

CC: President of the Senate and Speaker of the House, Chairmen of the Senate and House Education Committees, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

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