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Regents Approve GRAD Act Agreements

Institutions Pledge to Increase Graduation Rates by 7 Percentage Points

BATON ROUGE, La. –The Board of Regents today approved campus improvement plans with Louisiana’s public colleges and universities that will result in an increase in the number of graduates and will produce a 7 percentage point increase in the statewide graduation rate in six years. Louisiana’s baseline graduation rate (2002 cohort) is 38%. The adopted GRAD Act agreements set institution specific productivity goals, including annual performance measures that will result in important improvements by the end of the six-year timeline.

The GRAD Act was approved by the legislature in the last session and signed into law by the Governor in June. Under the newly created law, the Board of Regents has the responsibility for entering into six-year performance agreements with participating institutions.

“The GRAD Act is one of the most significant higher education reform efforts our state has implemented,” said Board of Regents Vice Chairman Bob Levy. “These comprehensive improvement plans have the potential to drive statewide and campus efficiency and effectiveness for years to come. The goal is to remain steadfast and committed to this work.”

“The GRAD Act is a critical part of improving our higher education institutions’ competitiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency – and more importantly – the new law will help provide students with an education that prepares them for the 21st century workforce,” said Governor Bobby Jindal. “The new law incentivizes universities and colleges to increase graduation and retention rates and align academic programs with workforce needs which are critical as we work to deliver more value for students across Louisiana.”

"Recognizing the importance of higher education to the state of Louisiana, the Legislature worked hard on the creation and passage of the GRAD Act," said Speaker of the House of Representatives and author of the GRAD Act, Jim Tucker. "Louisiana's future is tied to a knowledge based economy, and the GRAD Act will assure that higher education will be focused on the 21st Century economy and all the opportunities associated with it."

The GRAD Act includes four performance objectives –student success, articulation and transfer, workforce and economic development, and institutional efficiency and accountability. While today’s initial focus is on the critical area of student success, there are 52 measures of institutional progress that will be annually tracked and evaluated by the Board of Regents. Each institution has its own goals for progress and will be measured against its own improvement plan.

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“The fact that every institution in the state is participating is a testament to their commitment to improve,” noted Levy. “The initial focus on educational attainment and workforce delivery supports the needs of the state and the expectations of the public.”

“CABL believes the GRAD Act will be a powerful tool among others the Board of Regents has already put in place to drive performance in higher education,” said Barry Erwin, President and C.E.O. of Council for a Better Louisiana. “It is encouraging to see such broad participation by institutions and commitment to continued improvement and student success.”

All public postsecondary education institutions are participating in the GRAD Act this fall with the exception of the health sciences centers which are anticipated to sign agreements this spring.

"For some time now, our colleges and universities have made a concerted effort to improve the quality and value of the higher education services and workforce training programs provided to our citizens," said Senate President Joel Chaisson. "The institutions' commitment to the performance objectives required by the GRAD Act are a continuation of that effort. I applaud that commitment and look forward to working with our higher education officials to make sure all of our citizens continue to have access to a viable and responsive higher education system."

“The willingness of our postsecondary institutions to meet the performance standards mandated by the GRAD Act shows their commitment to providing the quality educational system needed by their students and the state’s workforce,” said Senate Education Chairman Ben Nevers. “I commend the Board of Regents and the postsecondary institutions and their management boards for implementing this legislation in a very short period of time.”

“Improving educational attainment is the name of the game,” said Board of Regents member Charlotte Bollinger. “The GRAD Act is critically important to Louisiana if we ever hope to compete in a global economy. It focuses our attention on making sure more of our citizens earn a postsecondary education credential. These agreements allow us to measure what matters and present our progress in a way everyone can understand and support. A well-trained populace is what Louisiana needs and deserves.”

“The GRAD Act is very much in line with national efforts to improve educational attainment,” said Tom Layzell, a former commissioner of higher education in three states who has been advising the Board of Regents in their GRAD Act discussions. “Louisiana’s institutions of higher education have launched a number of initiatives to help students succeed. The GRAD Act establishes a solid foundation for continuing and enhancing those initiatives.”

In the agreement, the institution commits to meet the performance objectives in exchange for increased autonomy and flexibility. Regents will monitor performance of the institutions and submit an annual report on the progress to the Legislature and the Governor. In addition, at any time Regents may revoke an agreement for failure to abide by the terms.

Institution specific GRAD Act agreements and supporting documents can be found at www.regents.state.la.us by clicking on the GRAD Act logo. Items posted include:

- Legislation (Act 741)
- GRAD Act Agreement
- Context Documents (snap shot of an institution upon entering into agreement)
- Attachment A (list of all 52 measurements)
- Attachment B (operational definitions & reporting specifications)
- Attachment C (autonomies)
- Attachment D (six-year, institutional specific, student success targets)

Participating GRAD Act institutions, with management board approval, raised their tuition rates 5% this fall. The revenue collected from this tuition increase has been kept in escrow pending today’s Board of Regents’ action. Under separate authority from the Legislature, Louisiana’s higher education institutions had already raised fall tuition by 3, 4, or 5% depending on how far the institution is from the average tuition of peer institutions.