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**2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION:
STRENGTHENING LOUISIANA'S
WORKFORCE**



2026 Legislative Session Took Major Steps to Strengthen Louisiana's Workforce

The end of the 2026 legislative session was dominated to some degree by discussions over the budget and the redrawing of congressional maps. But if one were to look for an underlying theme that defined the session it was the large number and wide variety of bills to strengthen Louisiana's workforce.

The announcements over the last couple of years of more than \$100 billion in new economic development investments have been a source of pride and hope in the future of the state's economy. But it has brought with it the realization that to fill all the potential jobs will require increasing the size of our skilled workforce.

In response state lawmakers approved a wide range of legislation this session designed to address current and looming workforce issues. That included three major bills that were at the heart of the administration's legislative package:

- [HB 951](#): Creates a new office of "Business Workforce Solutions" in Louisiana Works with the primary mission of working with existing Louisiana businesses in every region to help craft solutions to their workforce challenges and supply them with the skilled and educated talent they need to grow. Better Louisiana helped research and craft this legislation in collaboration with Louisiana Works. \$31 million has been moved into the new office, coming from federal funds and the revised Incumbent Worker Training Program (see below).
- [HB 680](#): Builds on a federal waiver request to consolidate 15 local workforce boards into the state's existing Workforce Investment Council, empowering this business-led board to direct federal workforce training resources toward the state's economic growth priorities by addressing the workforce needs of Louisiana businesses. This long-sought reform and waiver isn't expected to diminish local and regional responsibility over delivery of workforce programs, but to create new, statewide coordination and accountability over them.
- [SB 383](#): Modernizes aspects of the Incumbent Working Training Program and likely increases the funding available in 2027 to \$35 million from \$20 million annually. The bill creates a more flexible workforce funding mechanism to meet a broader set of workforce training needs. New businesses will be able to access training grants sooner, and the legislation will now allow funds for more types of training, such as non-credit college or university courses, work-based learning such as internship and apprenticeship, and pre-employment training. It also allows funding for sector-based initiatives, regional workforce initiatives, and innovative approaches for occupations facing shortages.

Together, these bills represent major administrative changes that have the potential to transform the state's role in engaging with businesses and providing workforce solutions that connect citizens to high-paying jobs.

Beyond that, lawmakers and advocates, including Better Louisiana, championed a host of other bills that we believe are additional important pieces for solving the workforce puzzle.

- [HB 268](#): Strengthens existing law and policies to give students exposure to career opportunities while they are in middle school, so they are better prepared to explore pathways to good jobs through high school and beyond. Built upon the belief that students should start to learn about careers and jobs before high school, this bill was researched and crafted by Better Louisiana staff in partnership with the bill author and agency leadership.
- [HB 807](#): Establishes a program to increase instructional capacity in community and technical colleges in high-wage, high-demand fields.
- [HB 315](#): Prohibits employers from requiring non-compete contracts for interns and apprentices. Crafted with input from Better Louisiana's team, the author, LED, and LDOE, this legislation responds to concerns raised in the Career Alignment Task Force and elsewhere.
- [SCR 33](#): Creates a task force to study and evaluate Louisiana's current work-based learning efforts and make recommendations for improving coordination of high school internship programs promoted by the Louisiana Department of Education and apprenticeship programs promoted by Louisiana Works. Better Louisiana helped work with the author, Governor's Office, and agencies to craft this short-term task force.
- [SCR 65](#): Creates a task force to make recommendations on a statewide plan for advising students on career and academic pathways in K-12 schools.
- [SB 305](#): Creates a clearinghouse to help college students connect with career opportunities in Louisiana, providing information about high-demand jobs, the courses they need to get them, and the wages they can earn upon completion. This legislation came from recommendations from the Career Alignment Task Force.

Lawmakers also took a close look at some of our current workforce training efforts with an eye on increasing access for more citizens and getting a better understanding of what's working and what types of improvements we might consider.

- [HB 325](#): Expands eligibility requirements for the TOPS Tech scholarship program for students in community and technical colleges and broadens it to include part-time students. TOPS Tech targets financial aid funds to students seeking more career-

oriented associates degrees compared to TOPS which targets financial aid for four-year bachelor's degrees.

- [HB 649](#): Requires a simplified, uniform process to assist the growing number of students who are enrolling in postsecondary dual enrollment classes while still in high school.
- [SB 376](#): The Learn and Earn Act authorizes specialized career practicums or internships on high school campuses connected to formal business partnerships. There are examples in Louisiana of businesses like Papa Johns Pizza and credit union branches being operated by students on high school campuses.
- [HR 17](#) & [HR 171](#): Will produce studies on TOPS, TOPS Tech, and the M.J. Foster Promise Program, to better understand the return on investment of these major financial aid programs and how they can better serve the education and training needs of citizens. Several bills seeking to make more structural changes to TOPS and TOPS Tech, such as converting them to loans, failed this session. These data reports, to be produced by the Blanco Public Policy Center at UL Lafayette, will fuel a comprehensive discussion of the state's large annual expenditures on financial aid.

While studies and task forces sometimes seem of less value compared to passing new laws, the alignment of so many of these efforts suggests otherwise. Some of these things, like work-based learning and connecting students to careers and academic pathways, are new areas of focus for Louisiana. We need to better understand some of the issues surrounding them before we pass new laws.

Likewise, in terms of student financial aid, the state spends about \$400 million each year to help students get education and training beyond high school. But we still don't have the data we need to show how these efforts are paying off and where we might still have gaps. These studies will provide that information.

State Budget

The state spending plan that was presented by the Governor prior to the session and eventually approved by the Legislature is essentially a "standstill budget," meaning that despite some overall reductions, most agencies received about the same funding as last year. One exception to that was in the area of corrections where lawmakers pumped millions of dollars to cover rising costs related to increases in the prison populations, prisoner health expenses, and the hiring of additional corrections officers.

As in recent years lawmakers used various pools of non-recurring revenues to add funding to the state's "Rainy Day" fund and pay off retirement system debt. They also targeted

major, additional, one-time dollars to transportation funds, projects for higher education and local governments, and economic development initiatives.

Economic Development in the Budget

Louisiana legislators continued to signal broad, bipartisan support for economic development activities and progress. Financially, they also continued to make significant investments into Louisiana Economic Development's priority programs.

Notable economic development investments include:

- \$125 million for incentive funding into the High-Impact Jobs Program. The Governor requested \$75 million originally and the Legislature added another \$50 million. Originally passed into law in 2025, the program didn't receive an appropriation in its first year, so these funds fulfill the original promise from state legislators and the administration that the program would be funded as an annual appropriation going forward. For LED, the High-Impact Jobs program is replacing the Quality Jobs Program as the workhorse, core incentive tool used by Louisiana for incentivizing high-wage job creation by existing and new employers. \$50 million in additional funding to the Site Investment and Infrastructure Fund, also known as [Louisiana FastSites](#), includes a requirement that the assets in the fund be invested by the Treasurer in a separate portfolio and the investment proceeds be credited to LED for the same purpose as the primary fund. This is in addition to the \$150 million invested last year, bringing the two-year total to \$200 million for economic development site development.
- \$24 million for the Rural Health Innovation Fund. The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) has partnered with LED and its Louisiana Innovation team (LA.IO) to launch this new \$20 million [Rural Tech Catalyst Fund](#) to advance rural health care innovation.
- \$5 million for the Louisiana Talent Opportunity Initiative. This funding is in addition to \$5 million in talent marketing funding approved in 2025. The goal is to attract workforce talent to move to Louisiana for the growing number of jobs and opportunities that are available around the state.
- \$5 million in additional funding for LED's flexible Rapid Response Fund.
- The Legislature also appropriated funding for special projects through LED including \$25 million for the LSU Health Science Center in Shreveport, \$10 million for the [Charity Hospital renovation project in collaboration with Tulane University](#), and \$5 million for the wood pellet industry.

Education

The failure of Amendment #3 on the May 16 ballot took away a mechanism that state leaders were counting on to turn a temporary teacher stipend into a modest permanent pay raise. Because lawmakers did not extend that stipend in the new budget, the Governor and legislative leaders have said they will work after the session to find a way – as yet unclear – to retain the temporary stipend or provide teachers some sort of permanent raise. Last year, the cost of these teacher pay stipends was roughly \$200 million.

In something that took many by surprise, the state’s Revenue Estimating Conference met in May and reduced its official forecast for the upcoming fiscal year by about \$104 million. That meant that some things that were “funded” during most of the session, had to be cut to balance the budget.

The largest budget hit came in education where \$44 million in additional funding for the LA GATOR program was cut along with a \$29 million increase in the MFP, the formula that funds K-12 public education. The LA GATOR program will remain the same as the FY 2025-26 budget.

The Legislature also committed \$25 million more to the M. J. Foster Promise Program, used to target financial support for adults who are retraining for skills and degrees in high-demand sectors. This follows a commitment from the Governor’s Executive Budget to increase funding for this important workforce training program.

Early childhood education got a boost when lawmakers inserted budget language – similar in concept to a proposed Senate bill – for a one-year funding allocation that will put unspent or leftover dollars from the Louisiana Department of Education into the Early Childhood Education Fund (ECEP). That fund is used to match local dollars to pay for child care seats in early learning centers.

A [2025 Better Louisiana report](#) showed that the ECEP is projected to run out of funds without additional support. How much that move might actually send to the fund is unclear. Another bill that would have increased the revenues available to the fund from sports wagering did not pass.

In other areas of education:

- Lawmakers gave college campuses the authority to raise tuition and fees by up to 10% per year, giving institutions the most sweeping flexibility over tuition and fees that they have had in decades.
- Legislation to abolish the Board of Regents did not pass, though the Legislature did agree to remove some duties from the Regents while at the same time increasing their fiscal oversight over campuses.

- The Legislature gave researchers better tools to measure the impact of early childhood education on student educational outcomes in elementary school and beyond.
- Because of funding limitations, there will be no expansion of the state's successful high-dosage tutoring program and the current program will be cut. Legislation to extend tutoring to 4th and 5th grades failed to pass, and in a last-minute amendment legislators reduced the \$30 million allocation that had been in place the last two years by \$6 million. The high-dosage tutoring program has been highlighted as one of the reasons Louisiana's recent reading score performance has improved.

At the behest of the Senate President and Speaker of the House, lawmakers passed separate resolutions to create task forces to study the formulas that allocate state funding to K-12 public education ([SCR 80](#)) and colleges and universities ([SR 172](#)). The K-12 task force has a specific charge to explore ways that funds in the MFP could be directed toward teacher pay. Along with SCR 33, HR17 and HR 171, these point toward the potential for significant education reform discussions in 2027.

Conclusion

Budget concerns and redistricting battles notwithstanding, Better Louisiana believes this was another productive legislative session for the state. In particular, the work of lawmakers this year represents the most comprehensive effort in more than a decade to improve our workforce delivery system so that it can produce the outcomes that everyone in the state wants – connecting Louisiana people with Louisiana jobs that boost individual prosperity and grow our economy.

And as the various follow-up studies indicate, this should only be the beginning of that effort.