



# LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## *Job Description: Superintendent, Special School District*

### **Organization**

The Special School District (or “SSD”) is an educational service agency administered by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE). Since its inception in 1977, the SSD has provided educational opportunities to Louisiana students with low-incidence disabilities and a variety of unique needs. Currently, the District operates three schools: Louisiana School for the Deaf in Baton Rouge (LSD), Louisiana School for the Visually Impaired in Baton Rouge (LSVI), and Louisiana Special Education Center in Alexandria (LSEC). These state-operated schools provide educational programs to all eligible children in Louisiana – currently approximately 1,800 – with low-incidence disabilities who meet the admission criteria (deaf, blind, and orthopedically impaired, respectively). Children can enroll either as residential or as day students, and are welcome – at no charge – regardless of their place of residence within the state. Additionally, the Special School District provides educational programs to students enrolled at five privately operated facilities and twelve public health and correctional facilities spanning across four state agencies and four administrative departments: the Office of Citizens with Developmental Disabilities, the Office of Behavioral Health, the Office of Juvenile Justice, and the Department of Public Safety and Corrections. Across these entities, the SSD strives to honor its vision: *to empower students to turn challenges into opportunities as big as their dreams.*

### **Context**

In 2012, the LDOE launched a five-pillar plan – “*Louisiana Believes*” – to place all children in the state on a path to meet their greatest potential. *Louisiana Believes* is built on the premise that Louisiana students are just as capable as any students in America, and that those closest to children – parents and teachers – are best positioned to help students achieve those expectations.

In 2017, in response to concerns about student outcomes and opportunities in the three SSD schools, the LDOE assembled a team of experts to conduct an extensive evaluation of the schools and provide recommendations for each to become models of excellence in the state. Guided by the experts’ report (released in 2018 [here](#)), the SSD has begun addressing key challenges that face the District. Specifically, the report highlights nine best practices, which, when implemented with consistency, should have the greatest impact on school improvement and student outcomes:

1. Leaders have the appropriate levels of expertise;
2. SSD has the appropriate support and guidance;
3. SSD is organized so that decision-making related to operations is at the district level and instruction is at the school level;
4. Resources are allocated strategically;
5. There is clarity as to where the schools exist on the continuum of educational placements;
6. There are staff recruitment and retention plans in place;
7. There are districtwide supports to guide and build: transition services; student independence and self-advocacy; residential/school connections; security/emergency response; and professional school culture;
8. Each school is focused on a vision and mission; and
9. Each school holds high academic standards and provides options for all students to participate in these high standards.

*Louisiana Believes*

In order to fully address the recommendations of the report and to establish a clear roadmap for the next few years, the SSD engaged in a strategic planning process which included meetings with stakeholders (i.e., parents, advocates, staff), and regular leadership team meetings within the SSD. [The results of the process are reflected in this strategic plan](#), and its work is well underway in service of the ultimate goals: excellent student outcomes and opportunities, and a District that has transformed into a network of shared expertise and resources for the state with the intention of becoming national model of excellence in serving students with low-incidence disabilities.

### **Role**

The next Superintendent of the SSD will have an inimitable opportunity to improve educational opportunities, choices, and quality of instruction for thousands of children within all grades within one District in Louisiana. Success will require that this leader champions the vision for SSD and its unique student population, identifies metrics and communicates a higher set of expectations for the District, drives related transformation efforts, and builds a broad base of support through engagement with policy leaders at the state level, community and civic leaders, and grassroots leaders in homes and schools throughout the state. To accomplish this bold and critical work, the LDOE is seeking a seasoned, tested, high-caliber leader to assume the following **responsibilities**:

#### *Educational Leadership*

- Facilitate a collaborative effort to review and refine the SSD's vision, mission, and beliefs to focus on developing a statewide model of excellence in serving students who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired, or identified as having other low-incidence disabilities;
- Develop an annual academic strategy for SSD schools and programs anchored in high expectations and measurable growth in student performance and college and/or career attainment for all students, while understanding and celebrating what's unique about each school's student population and tailoring school strategies with these distinctions in mind;
- Develop clear, user-friendly criteria that clearly describe the educational role each school plays, the rationale for a placement in SSD versus an LEA, and the role of the schools within the continuum of special education services; and
- Ensure an academic setting that provides students with opportunities and supports to build their independence and self-advocacy skills on the path to adulthood. This element is essential not only at school, but this learning must also be integrated in dormitories and off-campus venues with community and work experiences.

#### *Communication*

- Provide the SSD stakeholders (LDOE leadership, members of the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, families of current students, and special education advocates) as well as the general public, clear, frequent, and easily accessible information about the schools, their missions, their curriculums, and their academic performance;
- Ensure that administrators and teachers communicate student progress and academic resources to parents; and
- Develop strong and sustainable partnerships with LEAs, other relevant state agencies, and with the wider field of national experts.

#### *Talent Management*

- Foster an environment that encourages continuous learning and improvement on the part of school staff;
- Develop and implements a hiring and retention plan that complies with applicable state and federal laws targeting the most qualified and competent teachers, administrators, and extracurricular personnel; and
- Administer an educator evaluation program aligned to state requirements that supports teachers and school leaders in defining expectations for student learning and monitoring progress against those goals throughout the year.

#### *Financial Management*

- Develop a multi-year strategic budget to achieve agreed upon strategic goals; and
- Evaluate the budget forecast and the effectiveness of academic programs as the foundation of the annual planning and budget process,

#### *Operational and Facilities Management*

- Develop systems of collaboration between SSD and other state agencies, and the wider field of experts both within and outside of Louisiana, in service to the plan of becoming a highly-functioning and valued state-wide resource;
- Administer the development, implementation, and annual assessment of educational programs consistent with state and federal requirements;
- Ensure that policies, procedures and school rules promote a safe, respectful, and healthy school environment; and
- Make administrative decisions necessary for the effective and efficient operations of the SSD facilities and property.

#### **Requisite Qualifications**

First and foremost, the SSD Superintendent must believe deeply in, and be motivated by, the SSD's mission *to provide compassionate, collaborative, and innovative educational opportunities for students with low-incidence disabilities, meeting each student's unique needs*. Additionally, the LDOE is seeking a leader with the following skills, experience, and attributes:

##### **Skills**

- Expertise in education of students or adults with low-incidence disabilities;
- Proven ability to recruit, manage, and retain high-functioning talent and teams;
- Deep and excellent capacity for relationship-building across teams, organizations, geographies, and interests; and
- Seasoned and innate instincts for authentic, effective professional communication with a wide range of stakeholders and personalities.

##### **Experience**

- Content expertise and seasoning in working with students with low-incidence disabilities, as well as all related federal regulations and systems (IDEA and ADA);

- Tested experience in managing systemic school-change processes, including articulating a new and clear and thoughtful vision and evidence of driving a team effectively through that change;
- A track record for holding schools accountable for high academic standards, accessible and appropriate assessments, and improved graduation rates;
- Experience navigating and leading effectively within a public advocacy context; and
- Demonstrable evidence of having had to develop a team or organizational strategy and being accountable for its results.

#### **Characteristics**

- The presence and poise required to be the public face of this unique entity;
- The executive presence to hire, engage, and develop mission-driven, impactful employees;
- The maturity and wisdom required to develop and lead a high-performing team through the implementation of large-scale, complex transformation;
- The humility and authenticity required to build trust and partnerships related to complex issues;
- Entrepreneurial instincts that enable a leader to envision change, spot potential for improvement, and support change management;
- The cultural competency required to work and build relationships effectively across differences;
- The patience required to oversee a complex organization in the public arena in a time of change;
- The sound judgement required to make decisions that impact the lives of children and their families, coupled with empathy; and, above all...
- An unwavering belief in the ability of all students to learn and reach their full potential.

#### **Reporting Relationships**

The SSD Superintendent reports directly to the State Superintendent of Education and is a member of the LDOE's executive council. Currently, the SSD Superintendent has two direct reports; one oversees operations/facilities/grounds/risk management/finance, and the other oversees academics.

#### **Location**

The SSD operates from a central campus in Baton Rouge, but has sites all over the state. The Superintendent must live in Louisiana and be able to travel to SSD sites.

#### **Terms of Employment**

The Superintendent of the SSD is appointed by the State Superintendent of Education, subject to confirmation by the Louisiana State Senate. Given the timing of this search, the successful candidate will officially be the *Interim* Superintendent until confirmed by Louisiana Senate in the 2020 Legislative Session. Length of contract and amount of salary will be determined by the State Superintendent of Education and will be commensurate with qualifications and experience.

#### **To Apply**

The Executive Search team at [Promise54](http://Promise54) is honored to be supporting the Department of Education in filling this critical role. Inquiries or applications (including a resume and cover letter) should be directed to Leslie Nair, Partner, at [leslie@promise54.org](mailto:leslie@promise54.org) by Friday, June 28, 2019.