



For Immediate Release
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Louisiana's Governor Requires Schools to Provide Meals and Instruction for the State's Children in Line with LDF's Recommendations

On Wednesday, Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards announced that the State's K-12 schools will remain closed for the remainder of the academic year, but pointedly emphasized that instruction will continue. "This is not the end of learning for this academic year. It's just the end of students physically going to school campuses," Edwards said. "I fully expect that instruction and learning will continue." In his proclamation, the governor mandated that public schools ensure the provision of meals and essential items for all eligible students, and distance learning (including "high-tech and low-tech" options) for all children. The governor made this announcement following a Wednesday morning call he and the state superintendent of education had with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), during which we strongly urged him to issue this critical proclamation. This call served as a follow-up to a letter we sent to Gov. Edwards earlier this month urging him to mandate that schools provide meals and instruction. LDF is encouraged that the governor was receptive to our requests and has taken this important step. However, it is key to ensure that this proclamation is properly implemented, and we intend to remain vigilant on behalf of Louisiana's children and families to guarantee that these obligations are fulfilled.

In our April 3 letter, LDF wrote to the governor on behalf of the thousands of Black schoolchildren and their parents whom LDF represents in school desegregation lawsuits across the state of Louisiana. For decades, these families have taken the lead in advancing solutions that will improve conditions for all. Many children have gone without meals or instruction since the governor's office ordered the closure of schools on March 13, even though school-provided breakfasts and lunches are often the only meals that students can reliably expect to eat each day. The governor's initial proclamation closing schools only asked that schools continue to provide meals and essential services to eligible students if they were able to do so with applicable staff. Since that time, many schools have either completely failed to provide meals or have only offered them in an inequitable way. Therefore, we are pleased that the governor's latest proclamation has firmly established meal provision as a requirement, noting that "all public school systems shall ensure the provision of meals and other essential services to eligible students."

Similarly, while the governor's initial mid-March proclamation only stated that "schools may offer complete distance learning, as capabilities exist," yesterday's proclamation *requires* all schools "to provide or ensure the provision of remote or distance learning." As we highlighted in our communications with the governor, this requirement is of utmost

importance, as nearly half of Louisiana's school districts have failed to offer any distance learning whatsoever since the school closure announcement on March 13. Moreover, this new requirement also ensures that school districts must work to provide distance learning in a way that meets all students' needs, which includes ensuring that students without access to the internet, a computer, a printer, or a car are still provided with quality educational instruction.

"We commend Governor Edwards and State Superintendent of Education Scioneaux for taking quick action to require Louisiana schools to provide students with meals and instruction – a measure we strongly encouraged them to take during a call on Wednesday morning and in a letter we sent to the Governor's office earlier this month," said Michael N. Turnage Young, Senior Counsel at LDF. "However, yesterday's proclamation is just the first step. It is imperative that school districts take the requirements of this proclamation seriously and implement them in a way that ensures that Louisiana's students – including African-American children, who were disproportionately negatively affected by the optional meal provision and remote instruction clauses in the previous school closure proclamation – receive consistent sustenance and high quality educational instruction. We urge the governor's office to implement the additional recommendations we made in our April 3 letter to achieve these objectives – and we intend to closely monitor how school districts respond to these requirements in order to ensure that they meet their obligations to their students."

All schoolchildren in Louisiana are entitled to quality distance learning and nutritional support. LDF's desegregation team's on-the-ground discussions with our clients in recent weeks has made it clear that this has not been a reality for many African American children since the state's schools closed. This new proclamation is a positive step in the right direction; however, LDF will continue to ceaselessly work to make sure that the proclamation's requirements truly come to fruition.

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Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation's first civil and human rights law organization. LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.

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