

As former Governors who care deeply about Education in Louisiana, we have come together to ask the Office of the Governor and the Louisiana Legislature to fight for our young people and make it clear that Education is Louisiana's Number One priority. We ask that you work together to continue strengthening Higher Education through proper investments.

We completely understand the budget pressures in this recessionary year and in this year of volatile, unpredictable energy prices, but slashing the budget of Higher Education is unacceptable for our students and for our future.

In addition, we believe that the need to re-organize and re-focus our colleges and universities and to designate levels of funding adequate to the task of building a system of excellence in instruction leading to the best employment opportunities for our college students is at an all time high.

Such reorganization and planning requires the leadership of our Governor, the focus of our Legislature, and the input of our education leadership, and time. It cannot be accomplished in a few days or weeks.

We therefore suggest a short-term (one year) budget for Higher Education with funds adequate for the short-term job, but including reasonable cuts and reprioritizing, without slashing the budget by double-digits in a single year. Short term funding could come from several alternative methods best selected by our Governor in consultation with the Legislature.

We urge the Governor to continue to make Higher Education a top priority and send a call to all necessary and responsible parties, including the governing boards of Higher Education and the Legislature, to join with him in a formal review of function and structure in higher Education so that the system can better meet the challenges of the 21st Century and the needs of our ever improving student bodies.

We are not asking that higher Education budgets not be cut. All families, companies, and agencies face that necessity during a recession. We are asking that they not be slashed in a single year without the benefit of a full scale review of needs, priorities, and restructuring. The best that this recession budget can do is buy us time to get a better plan for the structure and funding for Higher Education. The worst that this budget can do is gut our colleges and universities, foreclosing us to a system of mediocrity, and chasing our valuable faculty and students out of our state.

We have had that far too often in the past.

Lead governor, we are prepared to follow.