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Our view: Session holds much hope for higher ed

The most important issue to be addressed in the state legislative session is higher education -- what works, what doesn't and how to redirect precious state funding to reward the former and end the latter.

It's the most important issue because higher education is fundamental to the "New Louisiana" and its focus on engaging the knowledge-based economy.

Gov. Bobby Jindal has staked out his position: The first-term Republican governor will lead all efforts to establish a new public college funding formula, one that ties a portion of state money to performance rather than enrollment figures.

That is a crucial and necessary first step on the way the establishing performance as the primary factor used to calculate taxpayer support for higher education.

Those employed by the state's four postsecondary management systems support the theory, if not the process needed to achieve it. Fear of change will discourage some people in key positions from stepping up. Advocates of change need to be prepared for that.

Among those who are prepared is Blueprint Louisiana, a coalition of business and civic interests established in 2006. It has added a "New Economy" goal to its agenda to focus on this issue. It calls for establishing a "knowledge-based, innovation-driven economy" by doing two things:

"Shift to a performance-based formula to fund higher education -- to reward the results we need to transform our economy; and create a Louisiana Research Alliance to guide state investments to support diversification and growth of Louisiana's economy."

Advocates of Blueprint Louisiana will be in Baton Rouge throughout the session, which starts Monday, to keep lawmakers focused on this key initiative.

Likewise, the Louisiana Board of Regents has aligned its strategic planning. In its draft master plan for postsecondary education, the regents put it bluntly:

"The 21st century knowledge-based economy demands that postsecondary education in Louisiana be more innovative, more responsive, more collaborative, and more effective than ever before."

The board vows a "commitment to making hard choices," and it gets to the bottom line: "Increased accountability is not a goal -- it is a promise."

Let's make that happen, Louisiana.
