

 COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Got something to say? We've got a space reserved for you

Do you want to be published? Want to have your say on a current event or topic that you are passionate about?

If so, you should consider penning either a letter to the editor or a guest opinion and submitting it to The Times. Submissions can be made by sending them to 222 Lake Street, Shreveport, LA 71101, or by email to shreveportopinion@gannett.com.

The Times's daily Conversations page is available seven days a week for this type of content, so long as you follow the guidelines.

The first consideration is the length. Letters should be between 200 and 350 words long. Guest opinions should be at least 450 words but not much longer than 650 words. Length is important because the actual page has space limitations. Only so much copy can fit per column inch. The suggested

lengths here are ones that we know will fit in the spaces that we have allotted to the Conversations page each day. On



Jeff Benson
Columnist

Sundays, Conversations is allowed to have more than one page, and readers will sometimes see pieces that might be a little bit longer than the recommended word count; however, we still like to

keep our guest opinions and letters to a reasonable, consistent length. Although there are individuals within the local community who like to submit opinion pieces regularly to The Times, your submission does not represent any type of regular commitment.

Submit rarely or submit

often. Just submit. The timing is up to you ... and your passions.

The only thing to note about regular submissions is that we generally try to allow as many voices onto the page as possible, so if you plan regular submissions, you might want to time them so they are about three weeks apart. If not, we'll probably be holding them.

Some examples of local people whose names you might recognize as appearing regularly on The Times Conversations page: Dr. Aubrey Lurie, Sarah Hudson Pierce, Dr. Phillip Roze-man, John Byrd, Royal Alexander, Roy Fish, Elliott Stonecipher, Joe Cordill, Marc Pittman, Louis Avallone, Ken Cochran, Gypsy Boston, Prentiss Smith, Michael Stephens, Jerry Harkness and Andre Dean (if I've left someone out, I'm sorry).

What you write about is pretty much up to you, but we do like to keep it clean. Essays can

be about politics, government (local, state or federal), celebrating someone or something in your community ... really just about any topic/issue that you feel passionate enough about in order to pen something.

What we won't accept for publication are literary items like fiction or poetry. There is a market for that. The Times' Conversations page isn't it.

The Times pays to publish the work of a few syndicated columnists — Thomas Sowell, Cal Thomas, Dana Milbank, Kathleen Parker, Froma Harrop, Charles Krauthammer and Eugene Robinson — but aside from those, the rest of the content on our Conversations pages comes mostly from you, our readers and others in the community, who feel they have something to say and want to share it.

And that includes our elected officials. The guest opinion/

letters to the editor space is open to them as well. We get regular submissions from state officials. What we'd like to see more of are submissions from local elected officials.

One would think they'd jump at the chance to be better connected to the community through the Conversations page, but the reality is we rarely (if ever) hear from them in either format. Hey, the space is "free." And we (and your constituents) would welcome you opening that venue to begin a dialogue or just share information.

So get out your tool of choice — pen and pad, typewriter or computer — and record those words you'd like to see published on The Times Conversations page and send them in.

Jeff Benson edits the Conversations page and is community connections columnist for The Times.

Gabriel

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website and a link to "living in Shreveport-Bossier."

As our city's leader, our new mayor must keep the lines of communication open in city hall.

Health care

The decision to reform Louisiana's involvement in medical care has been criticized by some and heralded by others. It doesn't matter anymore which side you fall on, because what's done is done.

For our community what matters is how we manage the change.

The new University Health System, with hospitals in Shreveport and Monroe, has retained two nationally prominent health care advisers to assist it in developing improved access to medical care for families in the communities it serves. Dr. Regina Benjamin, former Surgeon General of the United States, and Charles Mann, former chairman of the Quality Committee for a large health system in the Washington area, began working with hospital administrators to achieve this goal.

In addition, we must be vigilant in our efforts to keep our medical school vibrant and competitive as we train doctors who will serve the citizens of our community. We also recognize the importance of Willis Knighton Health Systems and Christus Schumpert in the medical landscape of our community. All of these institutions create a tremendous economic impact with the people they employ and the medical care they provide our region.

As if this isn't enough, there are street improvements needed throughout the city, the completion of Highway 3132 and that \$300-600 million sewer system overhaul.

So now that we have decided on who will lead us the next four years, let's put our collective heads together and become a part of the solution to the challenges ahead of us. Our city's future will depend on it.

Chris Gabriel has spent the last 37 years serving the Shreveport-Bossier City community as a businessman, volunteer and even an actor. He now serves as executive vice president at Volunteers of America of North Louisiana and oversees LightHouse services.



GANNETT

In Louisiana, 27 percent of fourth-graders, and 21 percent of eighth-graders — were categorized as proficient in math.

Math instruction needs improvement

Report shows La. students lagging behind other states

By **Amanda McElfresh**
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Louisiana educators are calling for changes in math instruction based on a report that shows students in the state are falling behind their peers in other parts of the country.

The report was compiled by two statewide math educator groups, as well as the Gordon A. Cain Center for STEM Literacy at Louisiana State University.

According to statistics provided in the report, about 42 percent of fourth-grade students, and 34 percent of eighth-grade students in the United States, are considered proficient in math based on standardized tests. In Louisiana, the figures are even lower

— 27 percent of fourth-graders, and 21 percent of eighth-graders — were categorized as proficient.

In addition, only about half of high school students in Louisiana have mastered all of the skill areas in algebra and geometry, according to end-of-course data in the report.

"I think one of the problems that I saw was having a coherent progression of the mathematics," said Nell McAnelly, co-director of the Cain Center. "There were too many times where there were gaps in student education, where they didn't master something before moving on ... I think there have been cases of re-teaching things, or having big gaps, and we weren't teaching in a developmental fashion so that students were able to progress and master the material and understand it as they move forward."

Penny Gennuso, president of the Louisiana Council of Su-

pervisors of Mathematics, said the research has shown the importance of establishing a strong foundation in basic math skills before teachers and students move on to more advanced concepts.

"There's a strong correlation between being successful and understanding number sense and fractions, especially as it correlates to the success the student will have in algebra," said Gennuso, who is also the Lafayette Parish School System's math and science specialist. "Once you move into algebra, you have to find unknowns and think critically. Having a strong foundation in those early grades definitely relates to success in algebra."

To help Louisiana students perform better in math, some educators said they think the Common Core State Standards can be used in an increased way. In Lafayette Parish, Gennuso said the school system is using Eureka Math, a curricu-

lum that uses the Common Core standards.

"We've seen some data on schools that implemented it well last year, and they have increased scores in several grade levels," Gennuso said. "It seems like Common Core is heard as a bad word, but when you read the standards, they are really good. Is anything perfect? No, but it brings us to another level and I know if we really embrace it in Louisiana, we will see some good results."

McAnelly said she also thinks there needs to be more rigor in math instruction, which is called for in the standards.

"Rigor doesn't just mean harder," she said. "Rigor involves the conceptual understanding with the procedural skill and ability to apply it. We need to take the politics out of it and we've got to help our students. I hope this report focuses on that in such a way that it's a call to action."

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