B'ELIZABETH CRISP

TOO MANY UNIVERSITIES?

With 14 four-year schools, some question whether higher education funds are spread too thin.

What's more, college campuses serve as points of pride, as well as economic engines, for the communities around them. A proposal for merging the historically black Southern University at New Orleans and the predominantly white University of New Orleans in 2011 ignited a divisive controversy that ultimately scuttled the idea.

"Others say that in a state with one of the lowest educational attainment rates in the nation, there's no reason to close campuses," said Scott. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics, less than 17% of Louisiana residents age 25 to 64 have completed a bachelor's degree. The national average is 26.6%.

"Higher education is not the problem in Louisiana, it's part of the solution," said state Commissioner of Higher Education, Dr. Joseph Rallo. "Louisiana, argues that even if the state doesn't close campuses or even merger them, university administrators could at least find some ways to limit redundancies.

"Four-year schools bear part of the responsibility for the (call) situation we're in," Scott said. "Their insistence on not consolidating on a regional basis, on keeping multiple silos, there's no central back-office administration for a lot of these institutions.

"There are a lot of things they could do to make their operations more efficient, and they're not doing them."

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