



Give Every Kid a School That Fits



In spite of several targeted education reforms that have produced incremental progress, Louisiana remains at the bottom for student achievement nationally. Each kid is unique, with different abilities, learning styles, and challenges. What works for one may not work for another, even in a “good” school. Parents understand this better than anyone, and when they have the ability to select the school or educational environment that works best for their child – whether it’s public, private, or homeschool – every kid can excel, every sector of the education system grows, and Louisiana prospers.

PROBLEMS

Louisiana is home to about 800,000 school-age children. The vast majority (86 percent) are educated in public schools. Those schools perform below national averages for academic achievement, even with higher per-student funding than other states in the Southeast.

Less than 50 percent of kids in public school kindergarten through third grade are on track in reading. Less than one-third of students in grades three through high school are proficient in core academic subjects, per the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program. This is consistent with findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which shows Louisiana students scoring significantly below the national average. The Louisiana Department of Education has identified 40 percent of public schools as needing improvement.

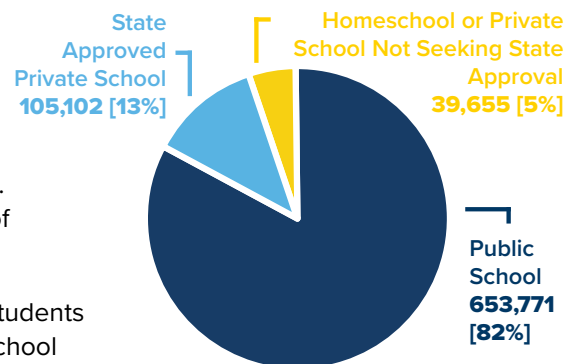
High school programming is in need of transformation to prepare students for college and careers. Only 42 percent of Louisiana public high school graduates on a university prep pathway go on to college and remain enrolled past their freshman year. Out of those graduates who immediately go on to a Louisiana college or university, 41 percent require remediation in math and 25 percent in English. Only 6 percent of graduates on a career pathway are earning advanced industry credentials fully aligned with high-demand, high-wage jobs.

Many schools are struggling to recruit and retain educators. Enrollment in teacher preparation programs has been declining, and Louisiana loses about half of the teachers in the first five years of teaching.

Academic improvement, innovation, and parental choice have been slow to materialize within Louisiana’s public school systems. Most families have few public options beyond their zoned school. Some who have the financial means have left traditional public schools, but private school tuition and homeschooling can be very costly. In a state that routinely ranks among the lowest for personal income, many families can’t afford these options.

Despite having a few private school choice scholarship programs for certain eligible students and 150 public charter schools, Louisiana is not providing enough educational options. As a result, children are not able to access the educational programs and services that best meet their needs and their opportunity to thrive is diminished.

Where Louisiana’s Children Attend School
2022-2023



SOLUTIONS

Given the current state, what should Louisiana's path forward look like for K–12 education?

1. Enact educational scholarship accounts.

All children in Louisiana should have access to state education dollars that follow them to the school of their parents' choice, based on what educational program or setting works best for them. Louisiana's current private school choice programs should be converted to or supplemented with a new educational scholarship program that gives families sufficient financial resources, a wide array of providers of products and services, and maximum customization to meet their child's educational needs. Several states have recently enacted universal or near-universal educational choice programs, giving parents the ability to access a portion of their tax dollars to fund enrollment at a private school of their choice or educational services from multiple approved providers.

2. Protect educational freedom.

Nearly 40,000 children across Louisiana are being educated in home study programs or private schools that opt not to seek state approval, and these have been the fastest growing forms of education for Louisiana families over the past several years. Many of these families have chosen to partner through co-ops, learning pods, and microschoools, and some have created hybrid models where kids receive some educational services at home and others at private schools. State lawmakers should be extremely cautious in enacting policies that regulate these forms of education, placing additional restrictions and reporting requirements on families that educate their kids without the use of tax dollars.

3. Restore charter school autonomy.



Charter schools were created to be innovative, autonomous, and free from laws and regulations that apply to traditional public schools. Over the years, the charter school application process has become overly bureaucratic and burdensome. The list of laws and regulations from which charters are not exempt has grown significantly, to the point that charter schools seem to be losing what made them different and innovative in the first place. Lawmakers and members of the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education should streamline the charter school authorization process, exempt charter schools from requirements that have accumulated over the years, and resist enacting new ones. They should focus ongoing monitoring and renewal decisions more on student outcomes and parental satisfaction than on measures that compare them to traditional public schools.

4. Improve quality assurance for public schools where kids are assigned.

Many families actively choose to send their children to the local public school to which they're assigned. Others have no viable option. That makes it even more important to ensure these schools serve students well. The state accountability and rating system for public schools should be easy for parents, educators, and citizens to understand. It should ensure that students are building strong literacy and numeracy skills early on; focus on proficiency and academic growth in core subjects; and equip both college- and workforce-bound students with the knowledge and skills they need to successfully transition to the next stage of life. The K–12 school and district accountability system and many high school offerings are not aligned with these goals. Correcting this must be a priority.



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