



# PROGRESS REALIZED

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A GUIDE TO LOUISIANA'S  
EDUCATION REFORMS



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# INTRODUCTION

Louisiana is making progress in education. Public school students are improving their academic achievement and have more school and course choices than ever before. More young people are prepared for opportunities after high school, and public schools are making better connections to the demands of our growing economy.

This is good news, and it's the result of two things:

- 1 Louisiana now has a strong framework of education reform policies and innovations that have been put in place over the last several years.
- 2 The hard work of effective educators and school leaders is paying off.

Unfortunately, many of our school systems across the state still lag behind. To close that gap, we need a sustained effort to keep moving forward while accelerating the pace of our improvement. How do we do that? Five steps are key:

- 1 Focus and build on recent academic progress.
- 2 Protect Louisiana's strong framework of policies and practices that are working.
- 3 Ensure quality and access to new or in-demand school and course choices in all regions.
- 4 Recognize that despite our improvements, we remain far behind our peers and must keep making progress.
- 5 Address lingering issues that continue to hold us back such as early education and teacher and principal preparation.

Unfortunately, Louisiana's education reforms too often get scrutinized in isolation despite the fact that these policies were not enacted in a vacuum. They are all pieces of a broad and connected plan that, taken together, has been key to our recent successes. Despite the rhetoric of some, *Louisiana's education strategies are working.*

This guide examines some of those successes and helps explain how our policies fit together to form a comprehensive and carefully considered approach to improving outcomes for all students. We hope you find it useful.

# STATE OF THE STATE

## What Louisiana has accomplished in the past decade

We know that public education in Louisiana has long been lagging. Our students consistently score below the national average across grade levels and across subjects, and Louisiana's average student performance ranked 47<sup>th</sup> in the country in 2013. These statistics have driven Louisianians to take action when it comes to education.

No single policy change will serve as a silver bullet. Instead of focusing on single isolated policies, the state has created a system of changes to improve education, and we are beginning to see the results.

### 2015 QUALITY COUNTS

CATEGORY	LA	U.S. AVERAGE
Children's Chance for Success	C-	C+
K-12 Achievement	D-	C-
School Finance	C	C
Overall Grade	D+	C

National Ranking on Achievement: #44  
- Education Week, January 2013

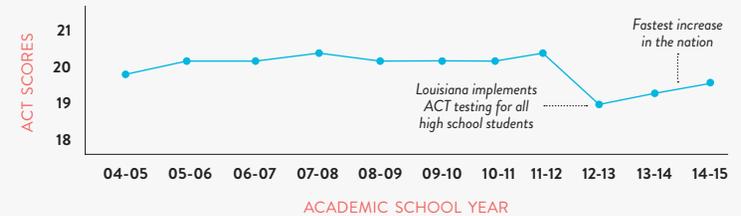
### LOUISIANA'S NAEP RESULTS

4 <sup>th</sup> READING	29% (up from 2013), #43
4 <sup>th</sup> MATH	30% (up from 2013), #45
8 <sup>th</sup> READING	23% (near static), #48
8 <sup>th</sup> MATH	18% (down some), #49

- NAEP Report 2015

- » Louisiana has narrowed the achievement gap between white and minority students by 12 points in English/Reading since 2000 and 11 points in Math.
- » More students than ever are scoring high enough on the ACT to enter some level of college in Louisiana (up approximately 6,300 students since 2012), and Louisiana has had the highest increase in ACT scores in the nation for 2014-2015.

- » A record high number of students are graduating from high school on time, up from 65% in 2006 to 75% in 2014.
- » Louisiana has more 4<sup>th</sup> grade students achieving "Basic" or above—from 40-50% in the early 2000's to more than 75% in 2014 in English/Reading and Math.
- » Louisiana has experienced a significant decline in school dropouts in grades 7-12 from more than 6.3% in 2008 to 4.5% in 2014.

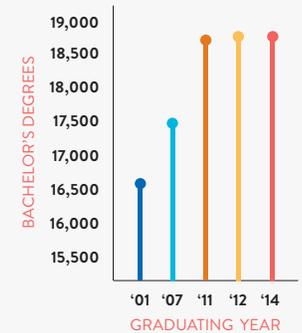


- » A record number of graduates are going to technical, community, or four-year colleges in Louisiana, up from 16,000 in 2008 to 23,000 in 2014.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF ADULTS > AGE 25 (2011)	LA	U.S.
Associate Degree	5.2%	7.8%
Bachelor's Degree	21.1%	28.5%

POST-SECONDARY ENROLLMENT (FTE) TREND	in Louisiana		
	2003	2008	2011
4-year colleges/universities	75%	72%	69%
2-year community/technical colleges	25%	28%	31%
in the South			
4-year colleges/universities	55%	55%	53%
2-year community/technical colleges	45%	45%	47%

ASSOCIATE DEGREES Awarded from 2-year and technical colleges	
2005	2,567
2012	4,303



The key question that arises is, what are the policy changes that have resulted in these improvements? Basically, they fall into six major buckets:

- Standards and assessments
- College and career readiness
- Teacher performance
- School performance and accountability
- School choice
- Recovery School District (RSD)

Despite our advances in the quality of Louisiana's education system, we still have a long way to go. In particular, the state must focus on addressing additional gaps that remain:

- 1 Early childhood education
- 2 Teacher quality
- 3 Implementation

Each of these represent key policy areas Louisiana must explore if it is to realize the accelerated gains in student achievement we all seek.

## SPECIFIC ISSUE AREAS

### STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT

**Nationally competitive, high learning standards and assessments.** Louisiana has had standards since the 1990s. The most recent iteration of those standards was the Grade Level Expectations (GLE), which were in place until 2011. The GLEs were a good set of standards, but because they were unique to Louisiana, it was difficult to benchmark Louisiana students’ progress with the rest of the nation.

**Louisiana has steadily increased the level of expected performance on state tests and has steadily improved its ability to make comparisons with other states.**

<b>1999</b>	Grade 4 and 8 LEAP assessments designed to be as challenging as NAEP. However, results are not comparable with other states. “Approaching basic” (level 2) and levels above earn schools performance score points.
<b>2000</b>	Grade 3, 5, 6 and 7 ILEAP assessments designed to be as challenging as NAEP. However, results are not comparable with other states.
<b>2013</b>	Grades 3-8 and high school English language arts and math transitional assessments aligns to Louisiana’s new standards. Only “basic” and above earn school performance points. High schools achieve comparability through ACT 11th grade assessment.
<b>2015</b>	Grades 3-8 English language arts and math exams fully aligned to Louisiana’s standards. Results are significantly comparable with other states for the first time.
<b>2025</b>	By 2025 schools earning ratings of “A” will average “mastery” performance rather than “basic.”

In 2011, Louisiana began transitioning from Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) to higher standards in math and English that made the state more aligned to academic expectations across the country and which made the state more nationally competitive. In order to align the state’s standardized assessments with the new standards, Louisiana chose to shift from its previous Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) to a new set of assessments for Grades 3-8 in math and English. Students in high school are still assessed using End-of-Course (EOC) Tests developed by the Louisiana Department

of Education (LDE), though the EOC tests have been adapted to align with the new standards at the high school level.

Louisiana is also choosing to raise the standard for proficiency, incentivizing schools to educate students more rigorously and deeply. Over the next 10 years, the state will move the proficiency benchmark from “Basic” to “Mastery.”

**Support for transition to higher-order critical thinking skills.** BESE and the Louisiana legislature have made clear that choices about curricula (e.g., textbooks, workbooks, online materials, scopes and sequence) rest with local school districts. In order to help districts to make choices about curricula and other items related to the transition to higher standards, the LDE has created free support toolboxes and curricular resources for districts to access.

**Expanded Access to Rigorous Courses and Assessments.** Louisiana now requires all high school students to participate in the ACT series, resulting in a larger number of students who qualify for TOPS in Louisiana. In addition, the state has expanded access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses for students across the state. More Louisiana students are earning credit on AP exams than ever before – up 89% in 2015 – the highest percentage increase in the nation.

### TEACHER PERFORMANCE

**A teacher evaluation system that uses outcomes.** In 2010, Louisiana adopted policies to assist with the design and implementation of a new teacher evaluation system, Compass, based on student performance and observations. This was the first time that an objective measure – student assessment data – was used to evaluate teachers, making the teacher evaluation system a more rigorous and informative process. Compass has temporarily been modified in order to be sensitive to the state’s transition to new standards, and in 2014-2015 BESE has adopted recommendations from a legislatively authorized study commission on Compass.

**Teacher employment decisions based on performance.** In 2012, the Louisiana legislature and BESE passed policies that required that districts consider performance in teacher tenure, compensation, firing and reduction in force (RIF) decisions, rather than relying solely on seniority. This has protected and rewarded teachers who are effective with their students.

**Evaluating leadership.** In addition to creating a new evaluation system for teachers, BESE has developed policies that measure the effectiveness of

principals and superintendents. Like those of teachers, evaluations of principals and superintendents must take into account student performance, and personnel decisions can be made based on principal and superintendent performance.

## SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

**School performance scores based on outcomes.** BESE’s primary role is to manage school districts by focusing on school performance, which BESE has based on student outcomes, including performance on annual state assessments, AP participation, graduation rates, and credit accumulation. This approach emphasizes to schools and school districts what really matters – how effectively they are serving students.

PERFORMANCE LEVEL	PRIOR TO 2025	BY 2025
Unsatisfactory		
Below Basic		
Basic	Proficiency	
Mastery		Proficiency
Advanced		

### Redefining proficiency.

BESE is in the midst of a gradual transition in the academic criteria definition for proficiency. Although performance at the Basic level has historically been the marker for grade-level proficiency in Louisiana, the state realized that

too many high school graduates were still underprepared when they entered college. For this reason, BESE chose to raise the criteria for proficiency in K-12 education. By 2025, BESE will define grade-level proficiency at the Mastery level rather than the current Basic.

**Letter grades and report cards.** BESE and the LDE have worked together to create a system of letter grades that accurately and easily reports schools’ performance to parents. School Performance Scores (SPS) and District Performance Scores (DPS) reflect both student performance and student growth of schools and districts respectively. Letter grades (A-F) are assigned to schools and districts based on SPS and DPS, respectively. The LDE has also created parent-friendly school report cards that share important information about a school in parent-friendly ways.

## RECOVERY SCHOOL DISTRICT (RSD)

**Expansion of RSD post-Katrina.** After Hurricane Katrina hit southeast Louisiana in 2005, BESE assumed management responsibilities of all failing schools in Orleans Parish through the state Recovery School District. BESE

has smoothed the transition for these public schools to become charter schools with increased autonomy as well as accountability. Given the success of charter schools in the RSD in New Orleans, the RSD has now expanded to other struggling school districts in the state, most notably in East Baton Rouge Parish.

**High-quality charter authorization and closing processes.** The RSD is one of the only school districts across the state that sets a high bar for charter operators who would like to open schools in Louisiana and one of the only school districts in the state and across the country that consistently closes failing charter schools.

**Unified enrollment system.** In order to help parents to navigate a decentralized school system and to provide equal access to great charter schools in New Orleans, the RSD and Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) have adopted a unified enrollment system called Enroll NOLA (also known as OneApp), which parents can use to choose the schools that best meet their children’s needs.

## SCHOOL CHOICE

**Charter schools.** Louisiana has continued to create policies that strengthen the quality of charter schools. These policies expand charter autonomy while holding charter schools to strict accountability measures. Some of these policies include lifting teacher certification requirements for charter schools, allowing charter schools to opt out of the state pension system, and streamlining the application requirements for potential charter operators.

**Scholarships.** The Louisiana state legislature passed a law that provides families whose children attend schools rated a C, D, or F with the option to attend private schools. The number of parents who are interested in this program continues to grow. It is important to note that this program does not represent an additional cost to the state and, in fact, actually saves the state money.

**Course choice.** BESE has expanded the opportunities available for high school students through programs like course choice and dual enrollment, in which high school students can enroll in courses online, at universities, or at technical colleges for high school and college credits. Most school districts in the state have launched these initiatives via JumpStart pilots, which seek to better connect students to college or careers.

## EXISTING POLICY GAPS

**While Louisiana has started to see some positive trends as a result of reforms, student performance is still lagging. It's clear that we must continue the path forward, particularly addressing some big gaps in reforms.**

**Early Childhood Education.** Louisiana is in the process of implementing pilot Early Childhood Networks that attempt to unify and streamline funding, standards, and accountability for early childhood programs. Despite the progress made in this space, much remains to be done for early childhood programs, especially related to adequate funding for early childhood programs and alignment of oversight processes.

**Teacher Quality.** Louisiana has also engaged in a series of pilots for changes to teacher preparation programs, titled Believe and Prepare. These pilots offer exciting insights into changes that could be made to different models of teacher preparation. However, the state must do a better job of selecting teacher candidates, training teacher candidates, and supporting new teachers as they enter the profession. BESE must consider innovative teacher preparation methods that are rooted in concrete practices and strong content knowledge, and it must hold teacher preparation programs accountable for their results. In addition, BESE should consider ways to improve how Louisiana attracts and retains high-quality teachers. Highly-effective teachers are essential to student success, and they should be recognized and compensated accordingly.

**Implementation.** Implementation of policies in Louisiana has long relied on the capacity of local school districts. Because school districts vary in their ability and willingness to adapt many of the changes designated by BESE, the state must continue to support and incentivize effective practices when it comes to the implementation of new reforms. Without state support for implementation, many of these changes will not result in the benefits that are possible.

## LOOKING FORWARD

As we examine our education policies and the successes they have fostered, it is important to remember that Louisiana is not alone. Other states are making progress, too, and global competition continues to increase.

That means that if we are to preserve the things we love about our state, enjoy a good quality of life in our communities, and offer wide economic opportunities to our children and grandchildren, our education system must continue to improve in the years ahead. We cannot slow down.

To do that, we must build on our accomplishments and address our gaps. More specifically that means:

- » Protecting and maintaining current education policies that are working
- » Insisting on rigorous academic standards
- » Demanding a strong accountability system
- » Empowering effective teachers and leaders, and
- » Building high-quality, in-demand school and course choices that will propel our students into a prosperous future.

It is a daunting challenge, but it is something Louisiana can do.



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