



Data Notes

The 35 indicators in the Louisiana Fact Book are designed to show where Louisiana stands on each item compared to the previous year to see if the state is making annual progress. These notes provide additional background on each indicator, as well as recent trends.

Education & Workforce

Kindergarten Readiness

Percentage of kindergarten students on or above “benchmark” for reading

This indicator has been trending downward for several years. In 2016, 54% of kindergarten students were considered “on or above level” in early literacy. By Fall of 2022 that number had dropped to just 39%. This speaks to the importance of providing access to high-quality early education experiences for all of our youngest children.

Third Grade Reading Proficiency

Percentage of 3rd grade students performing at “Mastery” or above in reading

Mastery is our goal for all students, which means they are solidly on grade level and proficient in the subject area. The percentage of students performing at “Mastery” or above grew from 36% in 2016 to 46% in 2019. When state testing resumed following COVID in 2021, the performance level had fallen to 38%. Though it did not grow in 2022 there was a significant increase, up four points, in 2023. Recent policy changes to address early reading challenges have been implemented and it will be important to continue to monitor their impact.

Eighth Grade Math Proficiency

Percentage of 8th grade students performing at “Mastery” or above in Math

Louisiana 8th graders have long struggled in Math. In the years immediately prior to COVID, the percentage of students at or above “Mastery” hovered just below 30%. Following COVID, scores plummeted to just 20%. They rebounded up to 23% in 2022 and remained at that level in 2023.

Growth Toward “Mastery” in Grades 3-8

Percentage of students in grades 3-8 achieving “Mastery” and above

This indicator blends overall student performance in grades 3-8 covering English, Math, Social Studies, and Science. In 2019 34% of students performed at “Mastery” or above. Following COVID, that dipped to 29% with a slight increase to 31% in 2022 and 32% in 2023. While recent scores have improved, this is a general indication that students still have not returned to already low pre-COVID performance levels.

Growth Toward “Mastery” for Economically Disadvantaged Students

Percentage of economically-disadvantaged students in grades 3-8 achieving “Mastery” and above

This indicator is a subset of the one above. In recent years economically disadvantaged students have performed roughly 8-9 points behind the overall student population. In 2019 about 25% of economically disadvantaged students in grades 3-8 performed at or above “Mastery” across English, Math, Social Studies, and Science. In 2022 it dropped to 22% and grew to 24% in 2023. Significantly, the 8-9-point performance gap with all students did not widen, but it remains a troubling data point that our schools must continue to focus on.

High School Students Graduating with College Credit or an Industry Credential

Percentage of high school students who graduate with some college credit, a market-relevant credential or both.

This is a number that has seen more-or-less steady growth in recent years as educators have increased efforts to create more pathways – such as dual enrollment and the Jump Start program – to provide more opportunities for students to earn college credit or an industry credential while still in high school. While the numbers were impacted some by COVID, they are expected to grow as Louisiana schools continue to strengthen their emphasis on offering college credit and career and technical training options.

ACT Scores

Average score on ACT as a percentage of the national average

Though the ACT assessment is not without its detractors, it is generally seen as an indicator of college readiness. In Louisiana, and in the U.S. as a whole, ACT scores have been on the decline since 2017, beginning well before COVID. That year the state average hit a high of 19.6. In 2023 Louisiana bucked the national trend seeing a slight tenth-of-a-point uptick to 18.2. A score of 18 is broadly recognized

as the minimum needed to be college ready. It should be noted that Louisiana is one of only six states that require all high school students to take the ACT. That will naturally skew Louisiana's averages below national scores where only college bound students usually take the test. But closing the gap with the national average is a good barometer of how much Louisiana students are improving over time.

High School Graduation Rates

Percent of each year's high school cohort that graduates in four years

Louisiana's high school graduation rate has generally been improving over the years. Over the last decade graduation rates have risen by about 10 percentage points to just over 83%. While the growth is commendable, the fact is that number is still low and the state goal is to reach at least 90%. Economically disadvantaged students graduate at a rate of about 5 percentage points below other students and some districts have graduation rates only in the 60s.

Postsecondary Education Enrollment

Percentage of public high school graduates who enroll in postsecondary education the fall after high school graduation

The recent peak in high school graduates enrolling in a postsecondary institution was 58% in 2017. That percentage dropped about four percentage points during COVID and has not recovered as of yet. Data from the Nation Center for Higher Education Management Systems indicates that when students from private schools are included, the percentage of college going graduates jumps to about 69%, ranking Louisiana 11th nationally (2018, data compiled every two years). While that is an encouraging number, only about 45% of the state's economically-disadvantaged students enroll in a postsecondary institution – a large equity gap that Louisiana must do more to close.

Education Attainment

Percentage of working-age population with a postsecondary education credential

Louisiana has one of the lowest educational attainment rates in the country. More than 1 million of our adult citizens have no credential beyond a high school diploma. The Board of Regents has set a statewide goal of having 60% of the state's adult population with a meaningful postsecondary credential by 2030. That is about the same percentage national studies suggest was needed to meet the state's workforce needs in 2020. Louisiana has seen slow, but steady growth in this statistic in recent years. Though it was slightly stunted by COVID, it has rebounded since 2021 and is now at its highest level ever: 49.5%. That still leaves us about 20,000 credentials below our goal of 85,000 students per year earning a credential. State leaders, including the governor and the legislature, must

place a sharp focus on this imperative over the next several years if Louisiana is to meet its immediate workforce needs and be competitive in attracting the jobs of the future.

Economy

Population Growth

Percentage growth in state population as compared to that of the nation and the South

In recent years, the South has been the most dynamic economic region in the country, yet Louisiana has not participated in that prosperity at the same level. Between 2021 and 2022, Louisiana had the third highest per capita population loss in the country, trailing only New York and Illinois. The only other southern states to lose population were Mississippi and West Virginia, though Louisiana's loss was greater. The U.S. Census defines the South as: Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Net Domestic Migration

The number of people who moved to Louisiana from another state minus the number of people who moved to another state from Louisiana.

Louisiana has experienced more than a decade of having more people move out of the state than move in. With the number of births still exceeding deaths on an annual basis, the movement of people away from the state has been the root cause of its recent population loss. Between 2020 and 2022, the number of people leaving the state was more than 80,000. This was the sixth highest number of people of any state in the country, exceeded only by states with much larger populations: California, New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. Generally, they are moving to other southern states with Texas the top destination.

Employment

The annual rate of job growth in Louisiana compared to the nation

Louisiana has seen steady employment growth since the pandemic and unemployment rates mirroring the nation. But its employment rate, which is the proportion of the state's working-age population that is employed, has been among the lowest in the nation. This is an issue, probably influenced by Louisiana's low education attainment rate, because it reduces the pool of workers available for the workforce.

Median Household Income

Median Household income as a percentage of the national median income

Louisiana's median household income has grown steadily over the years, but still ranks in the bottom 10 among states. With a median income of about \$53,000, Louisiana also has a low cost of living which mitigates the lower level of earnings to some degree. But of concern is the fact that income in neighboring Texas is about \$10,000 more per year and more people leave Louisiana for Texas than any other state.

Business Tax Climate

Louisiana's ranking in the Tax Foundation's "State Business Tax Climate Index"

Louisiana has a relatively low tax burden, but also ranks relatively low in the Tax Foundation's widely-followed index that measures how well states' tax systems are structured. A low ranking hurts the state's competitiveness and speaks to the continuing need for structural tax reform.

Poverty Rate

Louisiana's poverty rate as a percentage of the nation's

Louisiana's poverty rate has varied over the years. The 2022 rate of 10.9% dropped slightly from the prior year, yet remains among the highest in the nation. Generally, it is not much better than the rate a decade ago – a sign that Louisiana's economic progress has been minimal. In 2022 the federal poverty level for a family of four was \$27,750. But according to the United Way's ALICE Report, a Louisiana family of four with two small children actually needs an income of about \$66,000 to cover what are considered basic household needs. This includes the cost of various household essentials that are not considered in the federal poverty level calculation. Using this measurement, the report says 51% of households in Louisiana do not earn enough income to cover what it considers a "necessities" budget for families.

Child Poverty Rate

Louisiana's child poverty rate as a percentage of the national child poverty rate

Louisiana's child poverty rate of more than 22% in 2022 reflects a drop of four percentage points and moved the state from second highest in the nation to fifth. Still, having nearly a quarter of the state's children living in poverty sounds alarms on many fronts including concerns about health, nutrition, and growing needs for adequate social services. It should be noted that economically disadvantaged students face much greater challenges and achieve lower educational outcomes than children from

families with higher incomes. It will be difficult to reach our educational achievement goals without also addressing the high numbers of Louisiana children who live in low-income situations.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Recipients

Number of people in Louisiana receiving SNAP benefits

SNAP is often referred to as food stamps. Louisiana's current rate of SNAP recipients of just over 20% of households is the highest it has been since 2017. In May of 2023 that totaled more than 900,000 individuals. Generally, the maximum monthly SNAP benefit for a family of four is a little more than \$900 per month. In 2022, Louisiana had the second highest percentage of SNAP recipients in the country.

Health & Wellbeing

Life Expectancy

Life expectancy in Louisiana at time of birth

For years, the life expectancy rate in Louisiana and the U.S. has been increasing. Over the last two years there has been a 5.3% decrease in life expectancy in the U.S., mostly attributable to COVID 19 and increases in drug overdoses. In 2020, Louisiana had the third lowest life expectancy in the country, at 73.1 years. That is the same as it was in 1990 and down from a high of about 76 years in 2019. It should be noted that Louisiana has most all of the characteristics attributed to lower life expectancy. These include high poverty, high infant mortality, behaviors that impact health, a relatively high rate of death from COVID, the second highest death rate from drug overdoses, and the second-highest murder rate in the country.

Low Birthweight Babies

Percentage of low birthweight babies born in Louisiana

At 11.3% of births, Louisiana has the second highest percentage of low birthweight babies in the nation. That number has grown in recent years and is higher than the 10.6% recorded in 2015. This can be caused by a number of things including chronic health issues in the mother, giving birth at an early age, and substance abuse. Poverty is a predictor of the prevalence of low-weight births. Treating these infants is costly and risks to these children later in life include heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, and various developmental disabilities.

Infant Mortality

Infant deaths per 1,000 births

Louisiana's infant mortality rate of 7.24 per 1,000 births has seen a slight decline in the last two years, even as the national rate has edged upward. Currently, it is the sixth highest rate in the country, down from second-highest in 2020. Though there have been slight fluctuations, that is still close to the level it was back in 2015. The rate in Louisiana is twice as high for African-Americans than for whites. This is often attributed to the same factors as the prevalence of low birthweight babies, as well as lack of access to prenatal care. The reporting of data lags on this indicator because it measures how many babies die before reaching their first birthday.

Obesity

Prevalence of obesity in Louisiana among adults

Prevalence of adult obesity in Louisiana is the 7th highest in the country, approaching 40% of the population. It is more prevalent among African-Americans in Louisiana (45%) than whites (35%). In 2021, 24% of children in Louisiana were considered obese, up from about 19% in 2016. Obesity has many causes including certain medical conditions, hereditary genetic traits, and the use of some medications. But it is often a function of diet and lack of physical activity. Researchers note the paradox that obesity tends to be more prevalent in low-income communities and those who are more food insecure. Factors that lead to this include lack of awareness about nutritious foods, the higher cost of healthy foods, and the prevalence of food deserts where fresh foods are less available than cheaper and less nutritious processed food often purchased at convenience stores. Those who are obese face greater risks of heart disease, some cancers, diabetes, and strokes.

Heart Disease

Rate of deaths due to heart disease per 100,000 residents

Louisiana has the nation's fourth highest rate of age-adjusted deaths due to heart disease at just over 235 deaths per 100,000 residents. This is a number that fluctuates some from year to year, but has recently been increasing. In 2016 the rate was 213 deaths per 100,000. As with other indicators, those who are economically disadvantaged experience higher death rates from heart disease as a result of many of the same risk factors. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in Louisiana.

Food Insecurity

Percentage of low and very low food secure households in Louisiana

The prevalence of food security is measured by the U.S. Department of Agriculture through a series of interviews involving households in every state. Generally, food insecurity is defined as households that at times during the year were unable or uncertain if they would be able to acquire enough food to meet family needs because of insufficient money or lack of other food resources. Nationally, 11.2% of households in the U.S. were food insecure in 2022 (using three-year averages) compared to 15.2% in Louisiana. In 2022 Louisiana had the fourth-highest rate of food insecurity in the nation. The nonprofit Feeding America estimates that 53% of food insecure households in Louisiana are above the income threshold for receiving SNAP or food stamp benefits. Primary causes of food insecurity are poverty, unemployment, and unexpected income shocks.

Violent Crime

Rate of violent crime in Louisiana per 100,000 residents

The FBI defines violent crime as murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. For years, Louisiana has had the first or second highest murder rate in the country, but its rate of overall violent crime usually ranks fifth or sixth. In 2020, Louisiana's violent crime rate ranked 6th highest in the nation, up 15% since 2011.

Prison Recidivism Rate

Percentage of adult prisoners returned to custody within 3 years

The Department of Public Safety and Corrections tracks recidivism rates over a five-year period. We chose to look at return-to-custody rates after three years as a snapshot of the median return rate. This is why the most recent data point is for custody release in 2018. Recidivism rates are higher after five years of release. Generally, the rate of recidivism has dropped significantly over time. In 2007 the three-year recidivism rate for the total state inmate population was more than 36%, but had fallen to 30.5% by 2018. It is interesting to note that there is a large gap between recidivism rates in state and local facilities. For 2018, just over 25% of inmates in state facilities were returned to custody compared to almost 33% in local facilities. Though the prison populations are different in state and local prisons, this could suggest that inmates in state facilities may be receiving more rehabilitative and support services than those in local jails. This data tracks prisoners who are returned to custody for any reason, whether for committing another crime or violating their terms of release.

Infrastructure

Quality of Louisiana Roads

Percentage of roads in acceptable condition

This is based on data collected by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics using the International Roughness Index, a standard used around the world to quantify the roughness of roads. Louisiana roads currently rank 35th in the nation on this measure. The percentage of acceptable roads in the state in 2020 was 77% and has been slowly increasing over the last dozen years. The Reason Foundation, which does an annual highway report measuring a combination of administrative costs and highway conditions ranks Louisiana 40th overall. It gives the state relatively good marks on cost-effectiveness and administration, but much lower scores on quality.

Quality of Bridges

Percentage of Structurally Deficient Bridges

The Reason Foundation uses bridge inspection data collected by the federal government to rank states based on the percentage of their bridges that are deemed structurally deficient. This does not necessarily mean they are unsafe for all vehicles, but it often means these bridges have restrictions and are posted with certain weight limits. Louisiana ranks 45th with 12.8% of its bridges identified as structurally deficient. This is an area where most states have made significant progress in recent years, including Louisiana. In 2015 about 27% of Louisiana bridges were structurally deficient.

Access to Broadband

Percentage of households in Louisiana with access to broadband Internet service

Timely data in this area is difficult to obtain because of the rapid degree of change going on within the state and around the country. Data from national sources seems to indicate that Louisiana ranks somewhere in the middle of the pack of states when it comes to availability of very high-speed Internet. In 2021, census data showed 81% of households had access to high-speed Internet. Yet, that is in no way uniform across the state. Urban, suburban, and parishes with higher concentrations of industry appear to have relatively good access to high-speed connections, but there are many broadband deserts in rural areas where access can be extremely limited. Perhaps a bigger issue is that state data indicate nearly 45% of Louisiana households lack access to low-cost high-speed Internet. So, in places where good Internet is available, for many households it may be too costly. This is backed up by national data that shows Louisiana ranks near the bottom for broadband subscription rates.

Environment & Energy

Air Quality

Average number of “Good” air quality days in Louisiana’s 9 Core-Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs)

The Environmental Protection Agency measures air quality in a number of ways. “Good” air quality days are those that are considered satisfactory and pose little or no health risk to most individuals. This indicator measures the average number of “Good” air quality days in the 9 CBSAs in Louisiana which include Alexandria, Baton Rouge, Hammond, Houma-Thibodaux, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Monroe, New Orleans-Metairie, and Shreveport-Bossier City. Poor air quality can be caused by industrial and vehicle pollution, but also by certain weather conditions and other things such as wildfires and different types of burnings.

Safe Drinking Water

Number of water systems in Louisiana with health violations

Louisiana has more than 1,300 public water systems across the state. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 377 or 29% had some sort of health-based violation in 2022. Out of all the water systems in the state, 149 or about 11% were considered enforcement priorities meaning it was a water system with unresolved serious, multiple, and/or continuing violations.

Quality of Water Systems

Number of water systems in Louisiana out of compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act

Besides health-based violations, water systems are also required to comply with rules to conduct regular monitoring for drinking water quality and to notify consumers if there is a serious problem with their drinking water that may pose a risk to public health. In 2022, 466 water systems, or 35%, were out of compliance with at least one of these standards or requirements. Generally, the percentage of water systems in compliance has been trending downward over the last decade from 77% in 2012 to 64% in 2022. This is perhaps a function of water systems that are deteriorating due to age.

Energy Production

Total energy production in Louisiana from all sources

Energy production in states is volatile because it often depends on market conditions. Generally, total energy production in the state has remained fairly constant over the last several years, with increases in natural gas production offsetting recent and somewhat steep declines in oil and coal production.

Renewable Energy Production

Percentage of Louisiana's energy production from renewable sources

Roughly 4.5% of Louisiana's total energy production comes from renewables, ranking it 24th in the nation. About 60% of the renewable energy produced in Louisiana comes from agricultural products, primarily wood waste and sugarcane residue. Louisiana has one hydroelectric generating facility on the Mississippi River that produces about 30% of the state's renewable energy. Solar power, which is a fast growing, though still small, source of energy makes up the rest of the state's renewable portfolio. There is currently some interest in wind power that could be produced in both state and federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico. In addition, Louisiana has set the ambitious goal of producing at least 5,000 megawatts of power from wind by 2035.

Coastal Projects Funding

Projected annual expenditures on coastal projects and programs

In many ways it is difficult to measure success in our efforts to save coastal Louisiana. The types of projects that have been undertaken often vary greatly. It is possible to measure how much land has been restored, but in many cases, we are funding projects that are only meant to preserve. And how do you factor in the losses from a hurricane like Ida, that in a matter of hours destroyed more than 100 miles of coastline? Perhaps there is a way to measure land loss over time and compare it to what was happening before we began our preservation efforts, or determine if there is a reduction in dollar loss from storms as a result of our investments. But those present problems, too. For that reason, we chose to simply look at how much we are projecting to spend each year on coastal projects, recognizing that is also an imperfect measurement. Total project expenditures for 2023 were estimated at \$1.35 billion. That grows in 2024 and 2025 to about \$1.6 billion. Much of this is federal and one-time funding which will somehow have to be replaced in the future to sustain the current level of investment.