



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%. But in Fall of 2023, the state moved from a policy that allowed districts to choose from among four approved literacy screeners to administer, to a single universal screener with a more comprehensive battery of measurements.

When that happened, the percentage of kindergartners reading at or above level fell to just 29.5%, a significant drop from the prior year. That change in screeners effectively made the Fall 2023 scores the new baseline for measurement. But scores continued to drop in Fall of 2024 with only 28.4% of students at or above level.

This indicator 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 in 3rd grade reading 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 the following year, there was a significant increase, up four points in 2023 and two more points in 2024. Today at 43% we took a slight dip from the prior year and remain three points behind pre-COVID levels. 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 2022-2024 and grew to 26% in 2025.

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%. In 2024 it returned to the pre-pandemic score of 34% and ticked up to 35% in 2025. This is an encouraging outcome, but it should be noted that scores in some grades and subjects have not made that full recovery and even these scores indicate that just over a third of our students are performing at grade level.

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. Following the pandemic, it dropped to 22% and has now rebounded to 26% in 2024 and 2025. Unfortunately, the performance gap with all students widened slightly, and this remains a concerning 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. Education leaders have increased their efforts to create additional 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 have shown significant growth since then which should be further enhanced by changes to the state’s school accountability system that strengthen the emphasis on offering college credit and career and technical training options in high school. About two-thirds of these college credentials were in technical fields, including health sciences and welding where the state faces critical workforce shortages. Significantly, this growth has occurred across all races and ethnicities.

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, ACT scores had been on a five-year decline before rising slightly to 18.2 in 2023. Though the state average remained unchanged in 2024, we showed improvement on our indicator because we compare Louisiana to the national average. National scores have been trending downward. Louisiana scores hit their all-time high of 19.6 in 2017. A score of 18 is broadly recognized as the minimum needed to be college ready. It should be noted that for more than a decade, Louisiana was one of only about a dozen states that had some sort of requirement for high school students to take the ACT. That naturally skews 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. Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, Louisiana high school students on a career diploma path will no longer be required to take the ACT and this will likely impact future ACT score averages.

High School Graduation Rates

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

For a number of years, Louisiana saw a general improvement in its high school graduation rate. About a decade ago, the statewide graduation rate was 74.6%. It rose to an all-time high of 84% in 2020 and then began inching downward, falling to 82.7% in 2022. It rose slightly to 83.2% in 2023. Some of the recent earlier declines are likely a result of the disruptions to public education caused by COVID and a rash of major hurricanes that hit Louisiana in 2020 and 2021. It is worth noting that economically-disadvantaged students graduate at a rate of about 5 percentage points below other students and this is more clearly seen in some of the state's larger, urban school districts where graduation rates are in the 70s. The state goal is to achieve a 90% graduation rate or better.

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 points during COVID and has not recovered as of yet. Current data show postsecondary enrollment directly out of high school at 52.8% in 2022 (the most recent year available), down from 53.6% the prior year. Interestingly, overall enrollment in Louisiana public, postsecondary institutions continues to rise, now standing at almost 270,000 students. This is largely driven by higher enrollment at LSU, which includes many out-of-state students, and community and technical colleges, which educate high percentages of the adult population.

It should be noted that only about 45% of the state's economically-disadvantaged students enroll in a postsecondary institution directly out of high school – 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. About 1.4 million of our adult citizens have no degree 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 certificate or credential by 2030. That is about the same percentage national studies suggest is required to meet the state's workforce needs. Louisiana has seen steady growth in this statistic in recent years. In 2021 the attainment rate was 47.3%. It rose to 51% in 2024, an all-time high. This is a crucial data point to follow and state leaders 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

For the first time since the 2020 census, Louisiana saw a slight uptick in its population, reversing three years of declining numbers. But the growth was small, less than 10,000 people, or an increase of just .021%. According to the most recent data from 2024, Louisiana's population stands at just under 4.6 million people, but that's about 50,000 fewer residents than in 2020. The recent increase is mostly attributable to international migration, which grew in Louisiana and many other states, perhaps partially due to new methodology from the Census Bureau. To put that in perspective, only three states lost population between 2023-2024. Louisiana's slight growth was the smallest in the country. The U.S. population grew by about 1%, but once again the South was the fastest growing region of the country, experiencing a growth rate of 1.3%. Births in Louisiana in 2024 just barely exceeded deaths, while at the same time more people continued to move out of the state than move in. Experts tend to attribute Louisiana's dismal population performance compared to the rest of the region to high insurance rates, recent hurricanes, and a stagnant economy.

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.

Every year since 2016, more people have moved out of Louisiana than moved in. Between 2020-2024, Louisiana had a net migration loss of more than 127,000 people. Only two other southern states

experienced a loss, Mississippi and West Virginia. If there is a silver lining to that, the 17,405 loss in net migration in 2024 is the lowest number in years and significantly better than the 29,692 figure in 2023. This is why our data point indicates a green arrow for improvement, even though more people continued to move out of Louisiana than move in. By contrast, the South has attracted more new people than any other region, growing by more than 2.8 million during that same timeframe. With the number of births still slightly exceeding deaths on an annual basis, the movement of people away from the state and its inability to attract significant numbers of new residents has been the root cause of its general population loss over the last several years. Once again, Texas is the number one state Louisiana residents move to.

Employment

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

This data is released monthly and is currently tracked through the second quarter. Over the course of the last year, three significant milestones occurred: 1) the number of people employed in Louisiana returned to pre-COVID levels, 2) the number of jobs in the state topped 2 million for the first time since early 2015, and 3) between June 2024 and 2025 Louisiana's job growth rate of 1.2% exceeded the national rate which came in at just under 1%. All of these are encouraging achievements, but the question is whether this slow but steady growth will continue. After employment reached 2 million workers a decade ago, the numbers then dipped slightly and remained basically flat until COVID. And while Louisiana's year-over-year employment growth was higher than the nation's, it remains far behind the job increases seen in other Southern states. At the same time, its workforce has also shrunk by about 85,000 over the last 10 years.

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 48th among states. Between 2022-2023 it grew by about \$2,800 to \$58,229. That also marked a slight increase of .8% closer to the national average. Though an improvement, Louisiana remains with Arkansas, Mississippi, and West Virginia as the only states with a median household income below \$60,000. Louisiana does have a relatively 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 \$17,000 more per year and more people leave Louisiana for Texas than any other state.

State Tax Competitiveness

Louisiana's ranking in the Tax Foundation's "State Tax Competitiveness Index"

Louisiana has a relatively low tax burden, but has historically fared poorly in the Tax Foundation's widely-followed (and now renamed) 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. After the passage of reforms to the state's individual and corporate income taxes in 2021, Louisiana moved up in the rankings from 42nd to 39th. For the last two years it has hovered at 40th. That

is expected to improve in the next round of rankings because of additional tax reforms that were passed by the Legislature in 2024. It should be noted that Louisiana is not the only state making improvements in its tax structure and that is a factor that impacts where the state stands in the rankings.

Poverty Rate

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

Louisiana's poverty rate has varied over the years. The 2023 rate of 14.3% marks a significant increase over the prior year rate of 10.9% and ranks second highest in the country. The U.S. Census Bureau tracks poverty with two different measurements – the official rate and the supplemental measurement. The supplemental, used here, is widely seen as a more comprehensive measurement because it takes into account economic benefits from governmental assistance programs, geographic variations in cost of living, and taxes and other necessary expenses. Louisiana has the highest poverty rate in the country (18.9%) according to the official measurement which is used to calculate eligibility for a number of poverty and work support programs.

In 2025 the federal poverty level for a family of four was \$32,150. But according to the United Way's 2025 ALICE Report, a Louisiana family of four with two small children actually needs an income of about \$80,000 to cover what are considered basic needs. This number clearly reflects recent inflation and includes the cost of various household essentials that are not considered in the federal poverty level calculation. Using this measurement, the ALICE report says half of households in Louisiana do not earn enough income to cover what it considers a "necessities" budget for working 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 29% in 2023 reflects a sharp increase from about 22% the prior year making Louisiana's rate the highest in the nation, by several points. Having nearly a third 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 households.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Recipients

Number of people in Louisiana receiving SNAP benefits

SNAP is often referred to as food stamps. It is totally funded by the federal government, though the state administers the program. Louisiana's current rate of SNAP recipients is close to 19% and about 45% of them are children. Generally, the maximum monthly SNAP benefit for a family of four is \$975 per month, though the Louisiana average per household is around \$370. The federal government spends around \$150 million in SNAP benefits per month in Louisiana or around \$1.8 billion per year.

During COVID, the federal government expanded SNAP eligibility and at the time close to one million people in Louisiana were signed up. Since then, participation rates have been volatile, but generally trending downward. Some of this could be attributed to changes within the program, but we would like to see rates fall because of improvements in the economy. A recent analysis by PAR showed Louisiana leads the South in SNAP participation rate and is significantly higher than neighboring states.



Health & Wellbeing

Life Expectancy

Life expectancy in Louisiana at time of birth

For years, the life expectancy rate in Louisiana and the U.S. had been increasing. Over the last three years there has been a noticeable decrease in how long we are living, mostly attributable to COVID 19 and increases in drug overdoses. In 2021, Louisiana had the fourth-lowest life expectancy in the country, at 72.2 years. That is lower than it was in 1990 and down by three-and-a-half years from its high in 2019. Life expectancy in the U.S. in 2021 was 76.4 years. It should be noted that Louisiana has virtually 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 fourth-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

Low-birthweight babies are those born weighing less than 5 lbs. 8 oz. At 11.5% 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 factors 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 7.4 per 1,000 births is the fifth-highest in the nation. Though there have been slight fluctuations, that is basically the same rate as 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.

Obesity

Prevalence of obesity in Louisiana among adults

Prevalence of adult obesity in Louisiana is the fourth-highest in the country, at just under 40% of the population. It is more prevalent among African-Americans in Louisiana (47%) than whites (37%). In 2022, 22% 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 fifth highest rate of age-adjusted deaths due to heart disease. Over much of the last decade, this rate was declining. It spiked to 235 deaths per 100,000 residents during COVID and dropped to 224 in 2022. But that remains higher than the rate of 207 deaths just prior to the pandemic. 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, 12.2% of households in the U.S. were food insecure in 2023 compared to 16.2% in Louisiana. In 2023 Louisiana had the third-highest rate of food insecurity in the nation. The nonprofit Feeding America estimates that about a third 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 is usually slightly lower. In 2023, Louisiana's violent crime rate was the 5th highest in the nation. That's lower than it was in 2018.

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 2020. 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 30.3% by 2019. It ticked up to about 32% in 2020. Interestingly, the recidivism rate in state facilities was unchanged between 2019 and 2020, while it went up for prisoners held in local facilities. There has long been a gap between the rates in state and local prisons. For 2020, about 25% of inmates in state facilities were returned to custody compared to about 34.5% in local facilities. Though the 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 45th in the nation on this measure. The percentage of acceptable roads in the state in 2023 was about 74%, a slight improvement over the prior year, ranking Louisiana 40th in the country. Nationally the average percentage of acceptable roads was 81%. The Reason Foundation, which does an annual highway report measuring a combination of cost effectiveness and highway conditions ranks Louisiana 46th overall.

Quality of Bridges

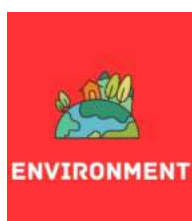
Percentage of Structurally Deficient Bridges

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. In 2023 Louisiana ranked 44th with 12.3% of its bridges identified as structurally deficient, basically unchanged from the prior year. This is an area where most states have made significant progress over time, 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 and consistent data in this area is difficult to obtain because of the rapid degree of change going on within the state and around the country. In 2023, census data showed 88% of households in Louisiana had access to some form of broadband Internet service. 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 still broadband deserts in rural areas where access can be extremely limited. The national group Broadband Now ranks Louisiana 40th on their index of Best States for Internet based on coverage, speed and price. Part of this is because low-cost Internet access is unavailable to many of the state's economically disadvantaged households. Backing that up is 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 almost 1,300 public water systems across the state. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 465 or about 36% had some sort of health-based violation in 2024. Out of all the water systems in the state, 195 or about 15% were considered enforcement priorities, meaning they were systems with unresolved serious, multiple, and/or continuing violations. Both of these numbers are up significantly from the prior year.

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 2024, 533 water systems, or about 41% 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 59% in 2024. This is likely 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. Recently, total energy production in the state has begun to increase, with higher natural gas production offsetting recent declines in oil and coal production. Louisiana ranks 3rd highest in natural gas production and 7th in proven natural gas reserves. It is also interesting to note that the U.S. is the world's largest exporter of liquified natural gas, and 61% of the nation's LNG exports go through Louisiana.

Renewable Energy Production

Percentage of Louisiana's energy production from renewable sources

Roughly 5% of Louisiana's total energy production comes from renewables, a significant increase over the last couple of years, ranking it 10th in the country for renewable energy production. About 56% of that comes from agricultural products, primarily wood waste and sugarcane residue that is primarily exported to other countries. Louisiana has one hydroelectric generating facility on the Mississippi River that produces about 27% of the state's renewable energy. Solar power, which is a rapidly growing, though still small, source of energy, makes up 17% 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, but virtually no potential for wind-produced electricity generation on land.

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. The state's most recent coastal annual plan includes a record \$1.98 billion investment in projects for 2026, dropping to a projected \$1.75 billion in 2027 and \$1.32 billion the following year. The bulk of recent expenditures have come from proceeds from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and unusually high state budget surpluses. Those surpluses are expected to decline going forward and the oil spill revenues will run out by 2032. Recent

Congressional action increased the amount of revenue the state will receive from offshore drilling in federal waters by close to \$50 million per year. But this will not close the significant funding gap looming in the years ahead.