



CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO EDUCATION

About Education in Louisiana

It's no secret that Louisiana is struggling to provide a quality education for its students. According to a 2018 policy analysis from the Cato Institute, Louisiana **ranked 46 of out 50 in the quality of its schools.**¹ This ranking takes into account student demographics as well as National Assessment of Education Progress test scores. Given these results, it's of little surprise that a state report found "The percentage of eighth grade African-American Students who achieved advanced levels of performance in reading literally rounds to zero."²

8th graders aren't the only ones struggling. When looking at the scores of 4th graders in both reading and math it's obvious to anyone that **Louisiana is failing to educate its students on the very basics.**³

Fourth Grade Reading Achievement by State

State	Overall Rank	Average Score (4th Grade Reading) 0-500	Difference from National Public	At or above Basic (Percent)	At or above Proficient (Percentage)
Massachusetts	1	236	15	80	51
New Jersey	2	233	12	78	49
New Hampshire	3	229	8	75	43
Connecticut	4	228	8	74	43
Florida	5	228	7	75	41
National Public Average		221	+	67	35
Texas	45	215	-6	60	29
Nevada	46	215	-6	61	31
South Carolina	47	213	-8	59	29
Louisiana	48	212	-9	56	26
New Mexico	49	208	-13	54	25
Alaska	50	207	-14	56	28

Source: Followrammy. "National Data Explorer - ETS." The Nation's Report Card, National Assessment of Educational Progress, www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/

1 Liebowitz, Stan J., and Matthew Kelly. "Fixing the Currently Biased State K-12 Education Rankings." SSRN Electronic Journal, 13 Nov. 2018, doi:10.2139/ssrn.3185152.

2 U.S. Department of Education, "The Nation's Report Card," 2017 Reading Snapshot Report: Louisiana—Grade 8, <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2017/pdf/2018039LA8.pdf>; U.S. Department of Education, "The Nation's Report Card," 2017 Mathematics Snapshot Report: Louisiana—Grade 8, <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2017/pdf/2018038LA8.pdf>

3 Department of Education, "Nation's Report Card," 2017 Reading Snapshot and 2017 Mathematics Snapshot

Fourth Grade Math Achievement by State

State	Overall Rank	Average Score (4th Grade Math) 0-500	Difference from National Public	At or above Basic (Percent)	At or above Proficient (Percentage)
Massachusetts	1	249	10	87	53
Minnesota	2	249	10	86	53
Virginia	3	248	9	87	50
New Jersey	4	248	9	87	50
Wyoming	5	248	9	89	51
National Public Average	NA	221	NA	67	35
California	45	232	-7	71	31
Alabama	46	232	-7	73	31
Nevada	47	232	-7	73	31
Alaska	48	230	-9	71	32
New Mexico	49	230	-9	69	27
Louisiana	50	229	-10	71	27

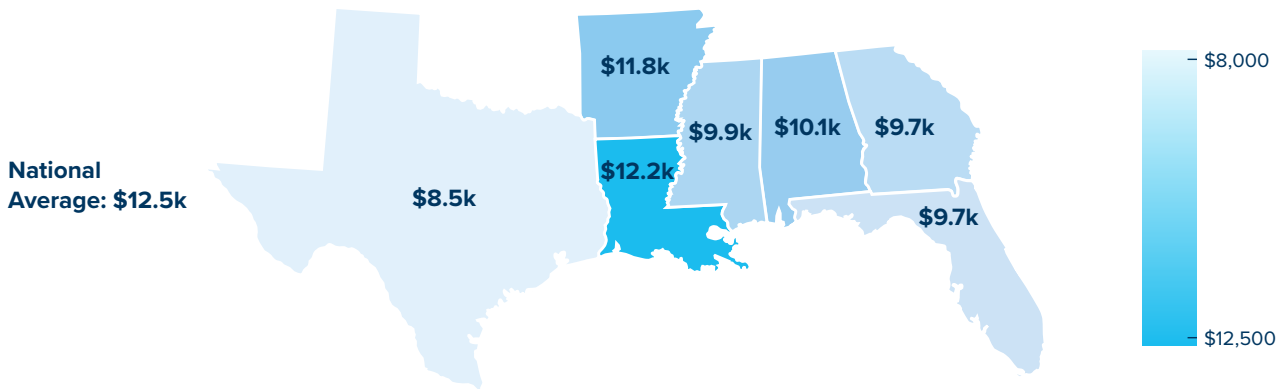
Source: Followrammy. "National Data Explorer - ETS." The Nation's Report Card, National Assessment of Educational Progress, www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/

About Education Funding

While the educational quality is certainly troubling enough, the spending side of the equation is nearly as concerning. Louisiana spends close to the national average per pupil, at \$12,153 per child, **which is more than all of its neighbors.**⁴

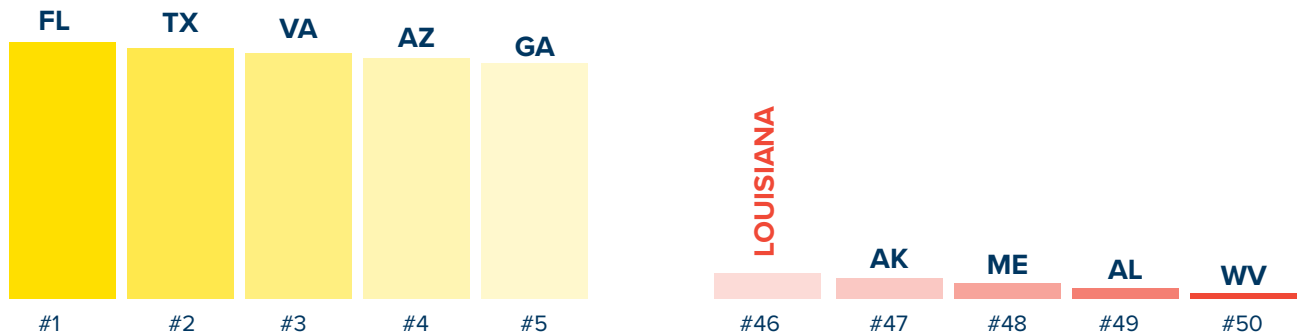
⁴ "Map: Per-Pupil Spending, State-by-State." Education Week, Education Week, 6 June 2018, www.edweek.org/ew/collections/quality-counts-2018-state-finance/map-per-pupil-spending-state-by-state.html.

Spending per Student by State



In fact, Louisiana spends almost more than \$3,000 more per pupil than Texas, which ranks 5th in overall quality according to the same 2018 Cato policy analysis and more than \$2,000 more than Florida, which ranks 3rd in overall quality. It's no surprise these states rank first and second in overall efficiency for spending while Louisiana again ranks 46.⁵

Ranking in Efficiency in Education Spending by State



State	Achievement	Spending	Resource Efficiency
Texas	5 of 50	\$8,485 per pupil	1
Florida	3 of 50	\$9,737 per pupil	2
Louisiana	46 of 50	\$12,153 per pupil	46

Despite the amount of money being spent on education, **it's difficult to find out how school districts are spending this money.** This is due to a few factors, including the state block granting funding to districts via the Minimum Foundation Program.

⁵ Liebowitz, Stan J., and Matthew Kelly. "Fixing the Currently Biased State K-12 Education Rankings." SSRN Electronic Journal, 13 Nov. 2018, doi:10.2139/ssrn.3185152.

This obstacle can be overcome, at low costs, to provide important information to the parents of Louisiana. The Lafayette Parish school system has adopted an online checkbook, via a unanimous vote, to put the parish's spending online. This allows anyone to see what money is flowing into the parish, from what sources, and where that funding is being spent.

This proof of concept shows that any parish can accomplish the same level of transparency and bring about more accountability to the school system of Louisiana.

Ideas for Reform

Given the need for greater education spending transparency, it is important to learn from other states who have succeeded in this endeavor. Here are some of the most successful measures Louisiana could emulate.

EXPENDITURES BY SCHOOLS

States can work to **establish baseline reporting mechanisms for how districts allocate expenditures to schools**. By breaking down spending into categories like benefits, pensions, transportations, etc. This will not only let parents see how their funds are being spent but allow educators at different districts to have apple to apple comparisons.

OUTCOME AND EFFICIENCY

Unlike the reason rankings outlined earlier in this paper, it's often difficult for parents or educators to see how much bang they are getting for their education buck. **Schools should not only list the learning outcomes of the students, but how much is spent to get there.**

SCHOOL TRANSPARENCY WEBSITE

While many districts struggle to make their spending transparent, Lafayette parish has managed to put their spending online at low costs. **Schools or school districts should work to put this spending online absent state action using the same checkbook tools.** The state, via legislation, could also provide a mandate and funding on this issue.

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