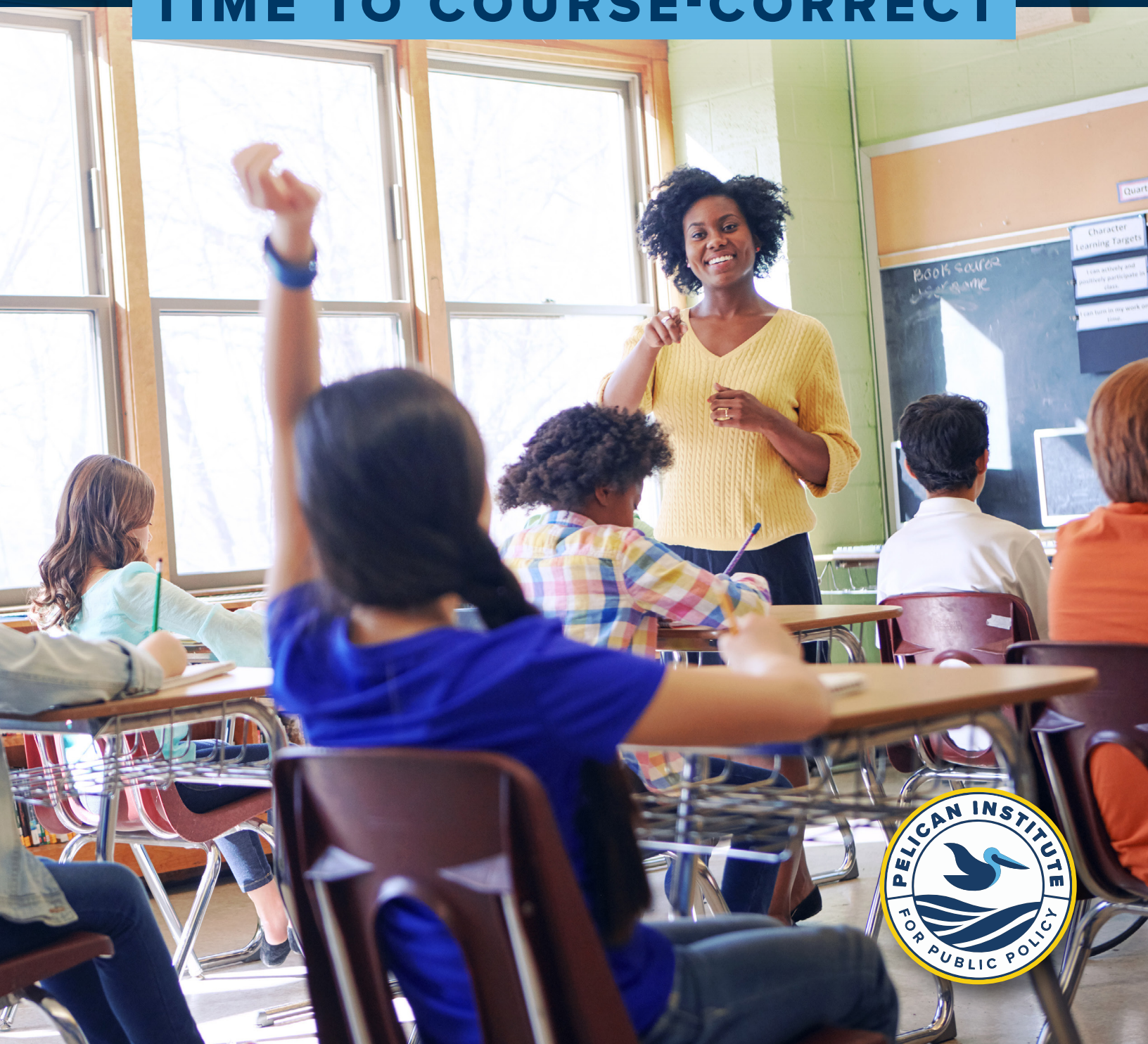


# 10 YEARS OF Course Choice in Louisiana

**TIME TO COURSE-CORRECT**



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## Introduction

Every family values the ability to make decisions in the best interest of their child, and this includes how they meet their unique educational needs. For many families in Louisiana and across the country, educational decisions and opportunities are limited by their income, where they live, and the information they can access. This means that, in many cases, educational options don't really exist. The offerings at the neighborhood public school are the totality of their opportunities.

Louisiana has long been a leader in the fight to expand opportunities for families, giving them the choice of schools and programs that meet their children's needs.

One state program created to deliver more educational options for families is the Supplemental Course Academy (SCA),<sup>1</sup> which was initially named "Course Choice." The program began as a way for students attending public schools to access courses of interest, fulfill graduation requirements that were not available at their home school, or courses of better quality than those offered at their home school. However, in the years since its inception, the student and parental choice aspect of the program has largely been eroded. The initiative has evolved into a costly statewide supplement for certain high school students to access dual enrollment courses for college credit and improve their ACT scores. The \$21 million that now funds the program (as of the 2022–23 school year) largely flows back to Louisiana's public colleges and universities.

Most students benefitting from the program are university-bound and planning to pursue a bachelor's degree following high school. Few leverage the program to access career and technical education courses (CTE) that prepare them to earn valued industry credentials. And sadly, many of Louisiana's most economically disadvantaged students and those historically underserved are not accessing the program at all.

Access to dual enrollment courses is important, and a state priority for all students, not just

those bound for four-year universities. They offer students exposure to college and a chance to get a jump start on their post-secondary education and training, often at little or no cost to their families. When students pass these courses, they generate significant value in the state's high school accountability rating system which measures and publicly reports on school performance. Given the benefit to students and to their schools, it's no wonder schools have leveraged the Course Choice program in this way.

But what about the other aims of the program? The legislation that lawmakers passed aimed to provide students and their families the ability to access a variety of courses by diverse public and non-public providers, including courses that may serve as alternatives to those offered at students' home school.

Course Choice began as a program to empower families needing additional options to meet their child's needs. It is not achieving this mission. Louisiana's state policymakers can correct this by improving the program's regulations, addressing the uses of state education funding, and ensuring that local implementation prioritizes individual student needs and communication with families. As Louisiana's new governor, lawmakers, and state education board members take office in 2024 and champion bold, transformational change in our state's educational system, they have an opportunity to course-correct this program, better meet student needs, and deliver on the promise made to students and families long ago.



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# Creation and Evolution of Louisiana's Course Choice Program

In 2012, as part of a series of reforms to Louisiana's education system that were part of then-Governor Bobby Jindal's agenda in the first year of his and many lawmakers' second term, the Louisiana Legislature passed Act 2,<sup>2</sup> which expanded private school choice, created new paths to open charter schools, and established the Course Choice program. The intent was to give Louisiana's students access to more academic and career-oriented courses, including for college credit, given many faced course limitations in their assigned public school.

The program envisioned courses delivered by other public schools, colleges and universities, and private providers upon approval by the Louisiana Department of Education (the Department) and its board, the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

The legislature required BESE to "create a process for authorizing course providers that shall determine whether each proposed course provider complies with the law and rules, whether the proposal is valid, complete, financially well-structured, and educationally sound, whether it provides a plan for collecting data in accordance with R.S. 17:3911,<sup>3</sup> and whether it offers potential for fulfilling the purposes of this Part. The state board shall provide for an independent evaluation of the proposal by a third party with educational, organizational, legal, and financial expertise." In response, the board adopted policies in Bulletin 132<sup>4</sup> to guide implementation of the program.

When Governor Jindal and lawmakers advocated for the Course Choice program, they made clear their desire to make courses available to all school

children, but particularly to those attending low-performing and rural schools. Course Choice was also envisioned to maximize educational offerings to meet individual student needs. BESE regulations<sup>5</sup> pull from the legislation, stating: "The Course Choice Program was enacted by the Louisiana Legislature so that all Louisiana school children have access to the type and format of education that best meets the needs of the individual student. Each student has different needs that merit a variety of course choices on the individual student level, and the state has the right, responsibility, duty and obligation to accomplish the objective of a quality, individualized education for all Louisiana children."

For example, a student interested in learning German would be able to access a course through a local approved Course Choice provider (instructor) or at a local college. A student attending a small rural school with limited Advanced Placement courses would have access to college credit through an approved private provider online or at a school in a neighboring district. A student wanting to become a welder might access courses at a local training center approved to participate in the program.

Ideally, conversations about course interests and availability would be routine, occurring within the Individual Graduation Plan (IGP) process. State law requires<sup>6</sup> that, beginning in 8th grade, schools annually consult with students and families to make plans to meet graduation requirements and a student's individual goals. Parents are required to sign the IGP each year. The IGP process is intended to be the time when parents are made aware of all course options at their disposal.

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Lawmakers hoped the Course Choice program could better address the educational needs of under-served students and motivate school systems to improve and expand their own course offerings, particularly at low-performing schools and those serving a high-need population. Students and their families would be empowered to determine which courses would best meet their needs, would not be limited to courses offered at their school (particularly if there were concerns about quality), and earn the credits needed to achieve a high school diploma and fulfill post-secondary interests.

Following a court ruling<sup>7</sup> which prevented the Department’s plans to redirect a portion of local school systems’ state Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) funds to other providers, BESE changed the way the program would be managed. Under the new plan, school systems would manage the program, approve

course registrations, and handle payments. The Legislature also added a reference to school system approval in R.S. 17:4002.5.<sup>8</sup>

Soon after, the move to leverage existing MFP dollars for this purpose became a new state expense instead. To entice local school leaders to cooperate in launching the Course Choice program and work with other providers, BESE and the legislature established a new funding source within the MFP called the Supplemental Course Allocation (SCA). The program was then referred to as Supplemental Course Academy. This change meant that local school systems could continue to enroll students and receive a “full school day” MFP allocation from the state while receiving additional state funds to enroll students in courses offered by outside providers. The move proved to be quite financially beneficial for them, but not for the state.

### Changes to Louisiana’s Course Choice program

	As initially envisioned	As currently implemented
<b>Funding</b>	Existing MFP (state and local) dollars	Additional state dollars (currently \$21 million appropriation)
<b>Students served</b>	All students eligible, but focusing on students in low-performing and rural schools with scarce high-quality course options, most of whom are economically disadvantaged	Students pursuing a TOPS University diploma (4-year university track); primarily not economically disadvantaged
<b>Courses provided</b>	High-quality courses to serve as alternatives to those offered in a student’s school, as well as desired courses not available at a student’s home school	Dual enrollment and a small number of other courses not available in a student’s home school
<b>Course approval and provider payments</b>	State approves student/family course requests and pays course provider out of school system’s state MFP allocation	School leaders make certain courses available to certain students through regular course registration process; course providers (primarily colleges, universities, and test prep providers) are paid directly by school system using SCA allocation

In 2014, the first year of implementation, the state launched the program with an additional \$26 per student enrolled in public schools in grades seven through twelve. By 2022–23, in response to increased funding requests by local school systems, BESE, and the state’s higher education system (which had become the program’s primary course provider), the state increased this amount

to \$70 per student and a \$21 million appropriation.

While the state continues to fund the program, having school administrators (and not the Department) lead program marketing and communications and sign off on course registrations has made it difficult to ensure students and their families are being offered the full breadth of courses.

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## Funding

The Supplemental Course Allocation (SCA), which now provides local school systems with additional funding, is a component of the state’s Minimum Foundation Program (MFP), the state’s funding formula for K–12 public schools. Each year, the MFP is developed by BESE, voted on by the Legislature, and then implemented by the Department through direct payments to local school systems. The SCA is one of several state initiatives or priorities that are funded in this way.

The 2022 MFP,<sup>9</sup> passed through the Louisiana Legislature’s House Concurrent Resolution 23, states: “For each city and parish school system and other public school, the allocation [for the SCA] shall equal the number of students enrolled in grades 7 through 12 as of February 1 each year multiplied by \$70 per pupil.” If a district or school does not expend the entirety of its allocation, those funds are redistributed to school systems that did, so they can fund additional courses.

The allocated \$70 per student, which over time has grown to an additional \$21 million cost in the state’s budget, funds a relatively small number of courses, considering Louisiana’s total student population. A high school with 750 students, for example, would be eligible for a total of \$52,500. This would align with the program’s original intent of enabling a limited number of students to take courses offered outside their home school. However, as local school systems began encouraging students to register for test prep and dual enrollment courses, the allocations have been quickly used up.

For example, a full year of ACT Prep taught by SCA provider The Princeton Review cost \$850 per student for the 2022–23 school year, according to the state’s online SCA course catalog. In a school receiving an allocation of \$52,500, all SCA funds could be spent providing 61 students with this access to this one course—only 8% of the students. Courses like ACT prep should arguably be available to all students—not just those bound for a four-year university—given that community colleges also rely on ACT scores for academic program admission and course placement.

Similarly, Course Choice was not originally envisioned to compensate local school systems and Louisiana’s higher education system for all of their dual enrollment. Until 2012, the Louisiana Board of Regents had regularly sought legislative funding for its Early Start<sup>10</sup> dual enrollment program to provide high school students with access to college-level courses. However, as schools used SCA to increase high school students’ exposure to college, the Board of Regents and state leaders saw less of a need to seek funding for Early Start, which had provided \$5.7 million for dual enrollment. Lawmakers made the last appropriation to the program in 2012, and Early Start’s enabling statute was repealed through Act 460 of the 2019 Regular Session.

Louisiana’s school systems have access to multiple funding sources in addition to SCA to meet the course needs of their students. Most school systems use SCA in combination with other flexible state and federal funds. The result is that

SCA funds have often become subsumed within broader programs and the program's unique original intent has been lost.

Louisiana provides a number of other funding sources,<sup>11</sup> in larger amounts than SCA, that can and should be used to support dual enrollment (including CTE courses) and test prep. They include:

- 1. General MFP Funds:** Because MFP dollars function as a block grant, local school systems can use them to meet a variety of student needs. The MFP pays for full-time enrollment, but approximately 50% of high school seniors take less than a full course load. Unused funds provided for those students' education should be available to support courses taken through external providers.
- 2. MFP Career Development Fund (CDF)**  
**Weight:** Each qualifying course enrollment for students in grades 9 through 12 is provided an additional 6% weight of the state and local MFP base. These funds are restricted for costs related to teacher training, equipment, facilities, licenses, and student transportation for CDF-approved courses.
- 3. MFP Career and Technical Education (CTE)**  
**Weight:** In addition to the 6% weight for CDF, the MFP is also weighted 6% for every CTE course that a student is enrolled in for both the fall and spring semesters. City or parish school systems that would have received less than \$25,000 under this calculation receive a minimum of \$25,000 and other local education agencies, such as charter schools, receive a minimum of \$10,000.
- 4. TOPS Tech Early Start:** This is a statewide program that provides up to \$600 per year per eligible student enrolled in up to six hours of dual enrollment credit per semester in eligible programs, which are those that provide an industry-based or vocational education credential in top demand fields.

**5. Carl D. Perkins V:** School systems work within defined Perkins regions across the state to leverage these federal dollars for CTE aligned to high-wage, high-demand jobs. In 2021, Louisiana received more than \$23,000,000 in federal Perkins V funding<sup>12</sup> which is administered by the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS).

**6. Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER):** Federal legislation passed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic provided \$4 billion to Louisiana for its schools with few restrictions on spending. School systems have been slow to spend down these funds, and they could serve as a potential funding source for course enrollments. The three ESSER allocations<sup>13</sup> offer broad allowability of expenditures including, "non-core/CTE supplements and materials for learning" among other associated costs like "student devices," "information and assistance to parents and families" and other general categories that could support CTE courses, dual enrollment, and test prep.

In 2021–22, the total amount of SCA funding allocated to districts and schools was \$18,012,523.<sup>14</sup> This includes the funding returned to the state by districts that did not expend their full allocation, which was reallocated to other districts. Funding is originally allocated on a per-pupil basis (\$59 per student in 2021–22, an amount raised to \$70 per student<sup>15</sup> for the current school year). According to LDOE, a total of about \$15,400,000 was eventually paid to providers after accounting for student no-shows and withdrawals.

Districts must report to the Department in a specialized SCA database which students are taking which courses. The total costs of these courses are added together and compared to the amount of the original allocation. In instances where the funds are not fully spent, the Department reallocates them to other districts.

## Top Five School Systems That Returned Unspent Funds in 2021–2022\*

District	Amount
Orleans (All Charter Schools)	\$394,779
East Baton Rouge	\$348,345
Lafourche	\$250,169
Terrebonne	\$190,381
Rapides	\$153,964

\*Provided by LDOE, September 28, 2022.

In 2021–22, the majority of SCA funding was paid to public Louisiana colleges and universities. Some funding provided to private providers, approximately \$972,295, was used for courses generating college credit. Public Louisiana colleges and universities received \$11,165,097 of the total \$15,407,000 SCA funding distributed in the prior school year (72.4%). Interestingly, no student withdrawals were reported by any public college or university, compared to an average

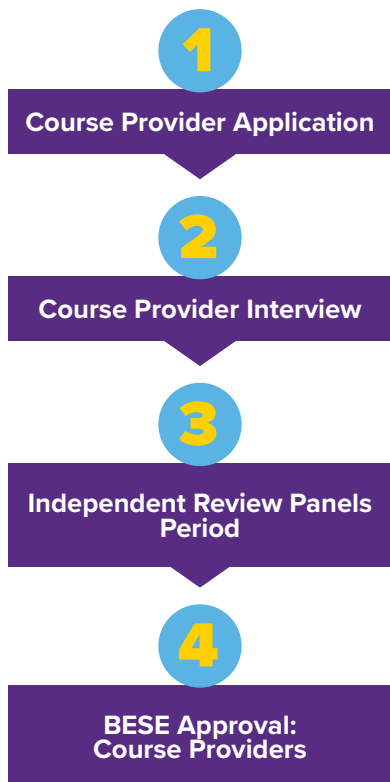
student withdrawal rate of 2.9% among the other providers. In response to questions, the Louisiana Department of Education confirmed that this information is not collected from public colleges and universities in the same manner in which it is collected from private providers. As a result, it appears that Louisiana colleges and universities are retaining funds for courses students don't end up taking.

Type of course provider	2021-2022 funding
Private provider	\$4,242,404
Louisiana Community or Technical College	\$4,692,441
Louisiana University	\$6,472,656
Terrebonne	\$190,381
Rapides	\$153,964

# Providers and Courses

Through Bulletin 132,<sup>16</sup> BESE established rules and regulations for the approval of SCA course providers and courses that are implemented by the Department. Potential providers must submit an application that includes the courses it will offer and describe how they will meet state requirements, including courses' alignment with Louisiana high school diploma requirements and their plan for assessing and reporting student learning.

The process for<sup>17</sup> approval has four steps.<sup>18</sup> First, potential providers submit a written application which can be revised only once based on Department feedback. The application includes sections on vision, background and capability, proposed curriculum, instructional quality, accountability, tuition, financial viability, and references. Applicants must also include a list of the courses they plan to provide. If selected to move forward, applicants participate in a multiphase interview process, a review by an independent panel, and finally review and approval by BESE.



Approximately 40 private providers<sup>19</sup> participated in the SCA program for the 2022–23 school year. When requested, the Department was unable to provide a total number of applicants in any given year or over time, so it is unclear how many applicants were rejected. A course directory lists each of the 40 private course providers and the course(s) they offer. It does not include Louisiana colleges and universities or their courses; that information is available in a separate listing provided by higher education leaders.

The course provider application and approval process, per BESE regulations, does not apply to public Louisiana postsecondary institutions or the courses they provide. Bulletin 132<sup>20</sup> states:

BESE shall include in the course catalog any course offered for dual enrollment by a Louisiana public institution of postsecondary education with no requirement for course approval by BESE or the Department, provided the course meets the Carnegie unit requirements for graduation.

Instead, the Louisiana Board of Regents (BOR), which serves as the state's coordinating board for higher education, has established policies and standards<sup>21</sup> for offering college courses to high school students through dual enrollment. Some experts have recommended that Louisiana colleges and universities seek accreditation through the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), a national accrediting agency for dual enrollment providers, as an independent measure of quality. Currently, no Louisiana institutions have NACEP Accreditation. However, to encourage institutions to align their practices with NACEP's quality standards, BOR has contracted with NACEP to provide statewide training in executing quality dual enrollment in Louisiana's postsecondary institutions. These trainings and BOR-led convenings of college and university leaders continue to emphasize the expectation that they ensure the academic integrity of all dual enrollment courses.



BOR regulations (Academic Affairs Policy 2.22<sup>22</sup>) set the minimum quality standards for institutions in the areas of course content, rigor, instructor qualification, faculty standards, course integrity, and student eligibility. BOR, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, and standards issued by NACEP all share a common expectation—that institutions of higher education ensure the academic integrity of their courses, regardless of instructor type, course location, or delivery method.

BESE Bulletin 132<sup>23</sup> also requires ongoing evaluation of course providers. They are initially authorized to participate in SCA for three years with subsequent approvals of between three and five years, based on student performance. For private course providers, student performance is reviewed and assessed through rigorous exams, attainment of industry-based credentials, and job placement. Positive student academic gains are evaluated through one of the following assessment methods, as outlined in Bulletin 132.<sup>24</sup>

Type of course	Assessment methods
Core academic	Standard Louisiana-approved end-of-course (EOC) exams, if available; other end-of-course exams tied to applicable Louisiana-approved course guidelines
Career and technical	Recognized state or national industry-based certifications based on proven methods Example: NCCER (National Center for Construction Education and Research)
College credit	Successful performance on Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exams Approved assessment method using a proven college-level EOC exam/exercise

Department staff report that these expectations are not applied to college and university course providers. Bulletin 132<sup>25</sup> does not specifically mention evaluation or reauthorization criteria for public colleges and universities that serve as course providers through SCA; however, the evaluation language reads as though it applies to all providers. Department staff reported that the language referenced above regarding colleges' and universities' initial inclusion in the program is being interpreted broadly to encompass continuing eligibility to deliver courses through the program.

Some have argued that this represents a double standard; however, the Department and higher education leaders have pointed out that because dual enrollment is funded through multiple sources (not just through the SCA), it would not make sense to require initial and ongoing approval for this program only. Instead, the state should have a comprehensive way of ensuring quality and evaluating student outcomes for dual enrollment generally, regardless of how costs are paid. Dual enrollment quality is not the focus of this paper, but it remains an important consideration as Louisiana works to successfully transition high school students to college and the workplace.

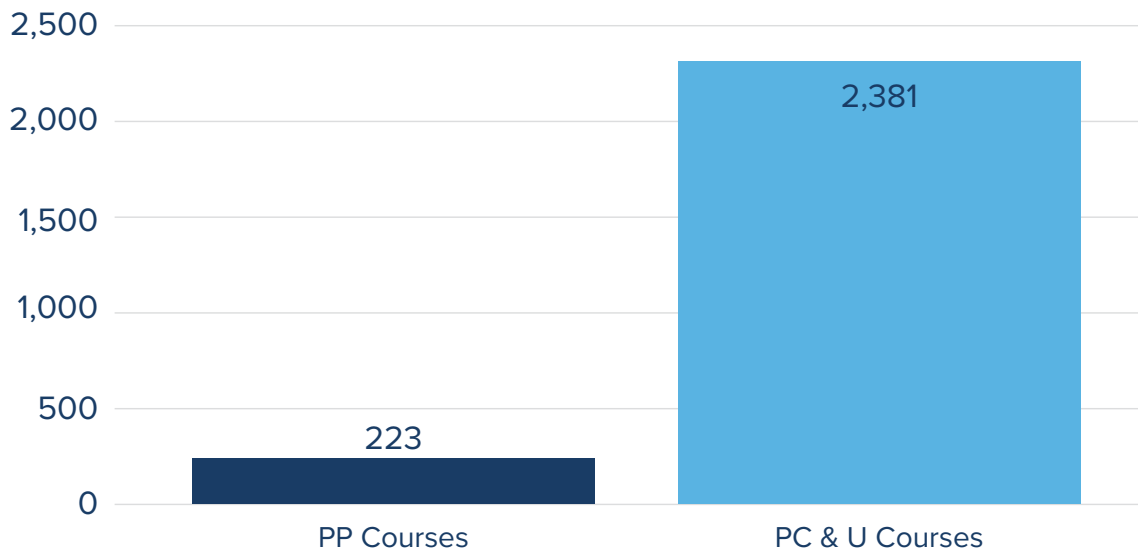


# Program Implementation Analysis

According to data provided by the Department, during the 2021–22 school year, a total of 54 SCA providers offered 2,604 unique courses. Just over half of those providers (28) were private. However,

those providers offered only 8.5% of courses (223) while Louisiana public colleges and universities offered 91.5% of courses (2,381).

## Number of courses by provider



## STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Lack of information about the opportunities offered by the SCA can lead to unequitable access by students. Enrollment by females in SCA courses is

nearly 15% higher than males, though males made up a majority of the student population.

	Statewide student population	SCA enrollment by sex	Funding percentage by sex
Female	48.85%	57.12%	53.70%
Male	51.15%	42.57%	45.60%
Unknown	0%	0.31%	0.70%

A look at course participation by other characteristics reveals similar inequities. Black students are underrepresented by 12.55%, with white students making up over 58% of enrollments despite comprising 42% of the statewide student population. Economically disadvantaged students comprise just 53% of total enrollments, although they comprise a much larger percentage of the high school student population.

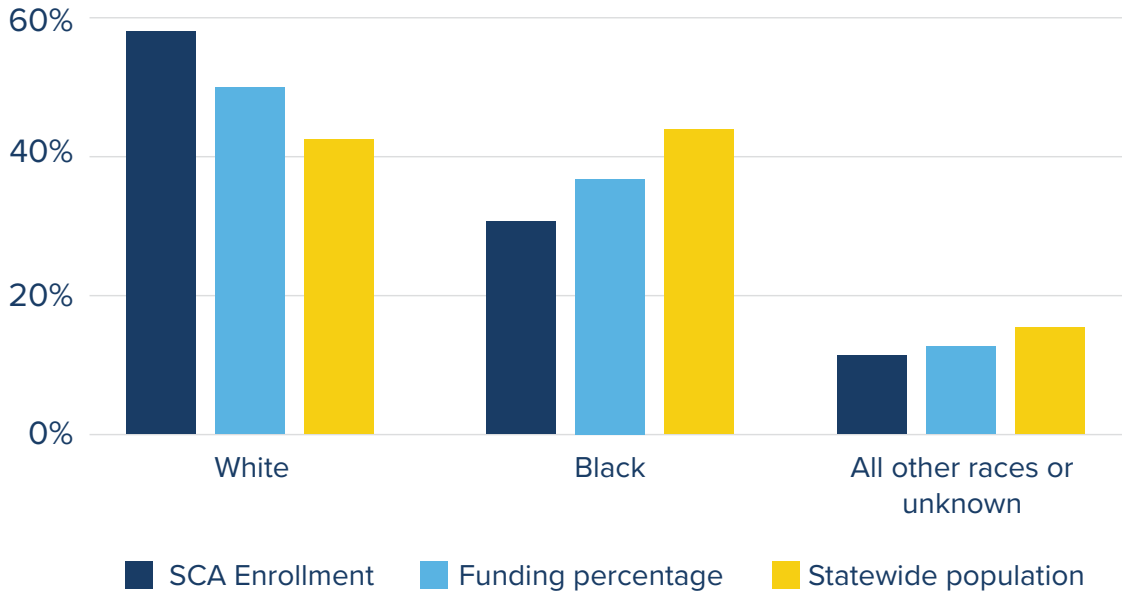
The funding differential, however, is not so stark. This is interesting because it points to the type of SCA courses black or African American students are taking. A total of \$1,899,851 (just over 13%) of SCA funding was spent on ACT prep courses. More than half (\$1,019,729 or 54%) was used by black or African American students, despite their accounting for only about 30% of SCA enrollment. Only 33.3% of the ACT prep funding was used for the

enrollment of the 58.4% of white students in SCA courses. ACT prep courses are some of the most expensive SCA courses offered. While the median course cost is \$225, the courses can range from \$100 to \$1,500 per student, depending on the level of support.

This is not surprising, given that 19% of black or

African American students scored proficient or above on the state’s most recent achievement exam (LEAP), compared with 47% of white students. However, it shows that while other students are receiving access to desired courses, many black students are leveraging the program to address learning gaps.

**SCA Enrollment, Funding Percentage, and Statewide Population**



**COURSE TYPE**

LDOE classifies all SCA courses as one of four types: academic, ACT prep, CTE, and elective.

<b>Academic</b>	These courses encompass typical academic subjects (i.e., biology and English) provided by colleges and universities as well as private providers. They include college-level courses for dual enrollment credit but also typical high school courses, like Algebra I, for Carnegie credit toward high school graduation.
<b>ACT prep</b>	These are courses geared solely toward preparing students to take the ACT, required for acceptance at many colleges and universities, as well as course placement within college academic programs, including at community colleges.
<b>CTE</b>	These courses as categorized in the SCA program are those that prepare students for a technical career, but do not generally lead to academic dual enrollment credits that would be accepted toward an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.
<b>Elective</b>	There are 1,583 courses that are classified as electives. The overwhelming majority of these are courses offered by colleges and universities for dual enrollment credit. Only 64 of these courses are offered by private providers for Carnegie credit, and they represent a small fraction of the total spent funding this category of courses.

Among these different course types, there are large differences in the number of offerings. A review of the data shows that more than 60% of courses, regardless of categorization, appear to be dual enrollment.

Course categorization*	Total courses	Dual enrollment	Not dual enrollment
Academic	160	147	13
ACT prep	28	0	28
CTE	832	0	832
Elective	1,583	1,512	71
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,380</b>	<b>1,666</b>	<b>937</b>

\*One course in the data is uncategorized but appears to be a dual enrollment course offered at a public university.

## FUNDING BY COURSE TYPE

Additionally, there are varying amounts spent on courses by type. These data cannot be used as a straightforward indicator of accessibility for students, however. This is because, for example, courses in car mechanics which require specialized equipment and facilities are more costly than courses taught online or in traditional classrooms. However, it is worth noting the amount of SCA funding that goes toward dual enrollment courses versus CTE courses, which could equip many students with the knowledge and skills needed to immediately transition to the workplace in a high-demand, high-wage occupation after graduating high school.

Course type	Amount paid in 2021–22 by course type
Unclassified	\$540.00
Academic dual enrollment	\$8,186,580.00
Academic non-dual enrollment	\$21,537.50
ACT prep	\$1,899,851.00
CTE	\$4,234,328.41
Electives dual enrollment	\$8,186,580.90
Electives non-dual enrollment	\$258,843.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$15,407,502.47</b>



## COURSE TYPE AND ENROLLMENT

More than two-thirds of course enrollments are in dual enrollment for college credit. The vast majority (88%) of those are for electives.

Course type	2021–22 total course enrollments*
Unclassified	3
Academic dual enrollment	4780.5
Academic non-dual enrollment	54.5
ACT prep	3,775
CTE	11,892.5
Electives dual enrollment	36,640
Electives non-dual enrollment	559
<b>Total</b>	<b>57,704.5</b>

*\*These numbers vary from total course enrollments because they include only the number of course enrollments for which the provider was paid.*

Additional qualitative research would be needed to report on how students and their families are making course selections, but it is surprising not to see more students pursuing academic courses, both through dual enrollment and private providers.



# School System and Family Roles and Responsibilities

State law and BESE regulations make clear that this program requires school districts and families to work together to ensure students access courses that best meet their needs. In addition to ensuring that students are learning and are earning appropriate credits, Bulletin 132<sup>26</sup> requires that local school systems:

- establish policies and procedures for determining whether a course is appropriate for a student;
- provide transportation to students taking courses during normal business hours; and
- make available to all students the BESE-approved course catalog during the course enrollment period.

Additionally, they are not to threaten, discourage, or intimidate students during the enrollment process—language added out of concern for students wanting to enroll in a course offered by a private provider that could serve as a competitor to the school system. Lastly, regulations require that school leaders be flexible with scheduling; provide appropriate environments, technology, and technical support for online courses; and do not deviate from the grading and credit awarded by the course provider.

The role of families is to work with the school to ensure that their child is enrolled in the appropriate prerequisites and meeting the requirements for graduation. If the student is taking an online course offsite, the family is also responsible for equipment and technology, monitoring progress, and ensuring active engagement.

In order to assess the extent to which local school systems were making program information available to families, public records requests were made of the ten of the largest local school districts in the state. The requests asked for:

1. A copy of all documents or webpages used to communicate to parents about their options

for selecting courses that match their child's interests or needs, including within the Course Choice/SCA programs or other programs.

2. A copy of all documents, or webpages used to communicate to staff about families' options for selecting courses that match their child's interests or needs including within the Course Choice/SCA programs or other programs.
3. A copy of all internal policies that guide how choice programs are implemented in the district inclusive of any requirements for parent communications. This includes SCA/ Course Choice and any other parent/student choice program operated by the school system.
4. A copy of all internal policies or guidance documents provided to staff, including counselors, business managers, principals, and external providers, on how the school system operates its choice programs, what the requirements are for communicating with families, the course selection and registration process, how courses are funded, and what data are provided to the Department.

The table below summarizes the responses from each district. With few exceptions, most of these local school systems appeared to not be providing families and students with the chance to learn about all the opportunities they have for choosing courses that meet their needs or post-secondary goals. Some appear to not be following program requirements.

Despite their other efforts, of the ten school systems whose information was requested, none provided evidence that they share with families the full list of providers and course offerings prepared by the Department for distribution to students and their families. As a result, it appears as though many families are unaware of the SCA program and do not have access to the full list of options available for their child.

School system	Information provided
Ascension	The school system provided several helpful documents about course options and resources for families in selecting courses and pathways to meet their child’s needs, but did not meet the requirement of sharing the full list of state-approved SCA course providers and courses available.
Bossier	The documents provided by the school system outlined a process by which students can request a course through their counselor, but would be charged \$150 to enroll unless they applied for an “SCA scholarship.” However, they noted that the “primary function” of SCA is dual enrollment and ACT prep courses, not choice course generally.
Caddo	Did not respond
Calcasieu	The school system provided state-produced policies and documents describing the program, along with a description of the state-required school choice policy for persistently low-performing schools, stating that they did not have policies beyond what was developed by the Department. Additionally, they provided multiple lists of course options for students that were extensive, but did not appear to reflect all approved SCA providers and course options.
East Baton Rouge	All documents sent in response to the request were related to specialized and magnet schools and programs and did not address how students not enrolling in those schools and programs could access courses of choice. When asked whether this meant that all students had to attend a magnet school or special program in order to participate in courses of choice offered outside the school system, there was no response.
Jefferson	Did not respond
Lafayette	The only document shared by the school system was its Pupil Progression Plan (PPP), along with a note that other policies are located on its website. The PPP contains the school system’s general dual enrollment requirements, but makes no mention of SCA or how a student can choose courses from an approved course provider outside of the dual enrollment registration process.
Rapides	Did not respond
St. Bernard	The school system provided a several helpful documents about course options and resources for families in selecting courses and pathways to meet their child’s needs, but did not meet the requirement of sharing the full list of state-approved SCA course providers and courses available. Every one of the school system’s SCA course enrollments for the prior three years were at the same community college, representing about \$434,400 total.
St. Tammany	Documents were provided to describe specific career program tracks, along with the school system’s policy for how dual enrollment courses are paid and requirements for students to enroll. No documents were provided that described how students could access a non-dual enrollment SCA course, nor was a listing of SCA courses or providers provided.

Additional analysis would be needed to ascertain whether this sample represents how school systems statewide are administering the program and communicating course options to students and their families.



## Findings

Based on analysis of data and documents collected from the Department and local school systems, the following findings have emerged.

1. School systems appear to not be communicating with students and families about all the options available under the Course Choice/SCA program, particularly through private providers beyond ACT prep.
2. School systems appear to use SCA funds in combination with other funding sources to support general dual enrollment, given the insufficiency of each individual funding source alone. It also appears that, given dual enrollment's heavy weighting in school accountability/ratings, schools are urging—if not outright limiting—course options to any type of dual enrollment. As such, most SCA course enrollments are elective dual enrollment courses, and students wanting to take other courses to fulfill Carnegie credits, needing academic coursework, or wanting to explore other areas of interest may not have access to such courses or may not receive appropriate advising on the best type of dual enrollment opportunity to pursue.
3. SCA course enrollments are not accessed equitably across Louisiana's diverse student population.
4. CTE courses that lead to a valued industry-based credential offer students the ability to train and successfully transition to high-demand, high-wage jobs. They are underutilized, and it appears that insufficient information is provided to students and families about the value of these courses, which could greatly benefit students as well as our state's workforce and economy.
5. As long as the school system decides which courses students can take and there are school rating/accountability incentives, there is a risk that decisions could skew in the direction that most benefits a school's ratings as opposed to what is most aligned with individual student needs.

These issues, especially the co-opting of SCA funds by districts for general dual enrollment programs, have pulled SCA from the purpose which initially set it apart: student and family choice.





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# Policy Recommendations and Opportunities for Further Study

A review of Louisiana’s Course Choice program (Supplemental Choice Academy) shows that it has drifted substantially from its original intent and can more effectively meet students’

needs if adjustments are made. The following recommendations would enable the program to deliver on its initial commitment to students and better support them for post-secondary success.

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## ENHANCE FAMILY COMMUNICATION AND COURSE ACCESS

1. BESE should require the Department to verify that school systems are offering all approved course providers and courses to students and their families, allowing them to make selections with appropriate school counseling. This can be done by requiring information to be posted on school websites, providing copies of handouts sent home, and/or conducting a sampling of audits each year.
2. The Department should widely disseminate the complete course catalog through an annual statewide press release and social media campaign, which would inform families of their child’s options and urge them to speak with their child’s school counselor about scheduling courses that may be of interest to them.
3. Families, not school systems, should have final say in what courses their child pursues, and both state law and BESE policy should be amended to reflect this. The state and local school systems should determine, based on total available funding from all sources, how many course registrations can be approved for each student.
4. The Legislature and BESE could study how similar programs function in other states. For example, in Iowa students and their families receive an account that is funded annually and allows them to pay for courses. Louisiana policymakers can then determine how updates to Louisiana’s efforts can further course choice goals.

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## ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND IMPROVE STUDENT COURSE COUNSELING

1. BESE should require the Department to annually report on the types of SCA courses completed, enrolled student demographics, and pass/completion/success rates to ensure equitable access and evaluate how well the program is serving students. They could collect information on whether students’ top course selections are being approved to better understand how local course enrollment decisions are made.
2. The Department should conduct further study on the large number of elective enrollments, consider university and career pathway preparation needs, and determine whether families and students need improved advising on course selections.

## COURSE/PROVIDER QUALITY ASSURANCE

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1. BESE should ensure that all course providers are subject to high levels of quality assurance. If dual enrollment or other types of courses warrant a different method of assuring quality, the rationale should be communicated and the applicable expectations should be equally rigorous, transparent, and involve a regular review of student outcomes.
2. All participating course providers should report student outcomes to BESE for all SCA courses taken. The LDOE should make a comprehensive report to BESE annually so that any questions or concerns can be addressed.

## USE OF FUNDS

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1. In partnership with the Legislature and Board of Regents, BESE should consider how it can consolidate funding streams and leverage other sources of state and federal funding for high school course choices and for students taking college-level courses. The current system is confusing, duplicative, and causes school systems to pursue differing objectives. At a minimum, BESE's multiple funding streams that support high school courses should be evaluated, and the state needs a single, coherent dual enrollment plan that identifies costs and determines funding.
2. A review of the data suggests that some students are taking multiple SCA courses. This is acceptable if sufficient funding exists. However, if demand exceeds available funding and school systems are unable or unwilling to use other (non-SCA) sources of funding to approve all external course requests, BESE should consider whether to institute a limit on the number of courses an individual student can take with SCA funding. This would avoid a small number of students taking the bulk of available SCA-funded classes and limiting access for others.
3. BESE should consider how MFP funding provided to school systems for high school students can be leveraged to maximize course choice, allowing dollars to follow the child. Seniors not taking a full course load should be encouraged to use the "unused" dollars allocated for their education to take courses for college credit or pursue courses aligned to post-secondary goals.

## Additional Resources

- Course Choice State<sup>27</sup> Law: The statute establishing the Course Choice program, operated as the Supplemental Course Allocation and Academy, can be found beginning with this statute.
- Supplemental Course Allocation Policy:<sup>28</sup> Bulletin 132 is the policy BESE established to guide the implementation of SCA by the Department and local school systems.
- 2022-23<sup>29-30</sup> Minimum Foundation Program:<sup>31</sup> Documents that describe the current MFP formula with detailed data sources and tables.
- Supplemental Course Academy Resources:<sup>32</sup> The Louisiana Department of Education maintains a website with resources on the Supplemental Course Academy, including links to the provider directory, student registration procedures, and instructions for potential providers interested in responding to the Request for Applications.
- Dual Enrollment: The Louisiana Board of Regents has established guidance and criteria<sup>33</sup> for dual enrollment and, in partnership with other organizations and experts, released a comprehensive report<sup>34</sup> on the current state of dual enrollment which included recommendations for improvement.

## Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/courses/supplemental-course-academy>
- 2 <http://www.legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=793655>
- 3 <https://www.legis.la.gov/Legis/Law.aspx?d=80938>
- 4 <https://www.doa.la.gov/media/atgjpyj/28v151.doc>
- 5 <https://www.doa.la.gov/media/atgjpyj/28v151.doc>
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- 7 <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/04/us/louisiana-voucher-programs-financing-is-ruled-unconstitutional.html>
- 8 <https://legis.la.gov/Legis/Law.aspx?d=815016>
- 9 <https://louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/minimum-foundation-program>
- 10 <https://regents.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/2013/03/HCR23DualEnroll.pdf>
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- 15 <https://louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/minimum-foundation-program>
- 16 <https://www.doa.la.gov/media/atgjpyj/28v151.doc>
- 17 <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/course-choice/2015-2016-course-provider-request-for-application.pdf?sfvrsn=2>
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