



SCR 9: Louisiana Task Force on Fatherhood Engagement

Final Report | February 2026

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Louisiana Task Force
on Fatherhood
Engagement



Photo by Hoi An and Da Nang

Executive Summary

Fatherhood involvement is increasingly recognized as a critical determinant of child well-being, family stability, and long-term social outcomes. National research demonstrates that children with engaged fathers exhibit stronger academic performance, healthier development, and reduced behavioral challenges.¹ Yet, Louisiana:

- Ranks 48th on Wallet Hub’s “Best States for Working Dads” list;²
- Ranks 49th on a recent analysis of Child and Family Service Reviews for engaging fathers in case planning in child welfare;³
- Has one of the highest male incarceration rates of any state in the nation;⁴ and
- Has over 56% of recent fathers whose highest level of education is a high school diploma or GED or below.⁵

About the Louisiana Task Force on Fatherhood Engagement

During the 2025 Louisiana Legislative Session, the Louisiana Legislature passed Senate Concurrent Resolution 9 (SCR 9) to create and provide for the Task Force on Fatherhood Engagement (Task Force) to study how Louisiana can increase the engagement of fathers in the lives of their children, to research best practices, and develop recommendations for each state agency to promote the full inclusion of fathers and the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. The Task Force was made up of representatives from numerous child and family-serving state agencies as well as fathers and leaders of fatherhood-focused programs and organizations from across Louisiana.

The Task Force met nine times between August 2025 and February 2026 at the Louisiana State Capitol and heard presentations and reports from the following state agencies or resources: Louisiana Children's Cabinet, Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), Louisiana Department of Health (LDH), Louisiana Office of Head Start Collaboration, Louisiana Supreme Court, and Louisiana Works.

Between October and December 2025, the Task Force also hosted nine listening sessions in communities across Louisiana that engaged 153 fathers in sharing in-depth about their experiences and conducted a survey that received 547 responses from fathers across the state. Task Force activities were coordinated by the Director of Early Childhood

Systems in the Office of Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry and supported with facilitation, writing, research, and project management by ResourceFull Consulting. Listening Sessions were hosted by Task Force members and coordinated by community-based organizations - many of which contributed significant in-kind support - that included: Beacon Light Baptist Church of Hammond, Calcasieu Parish Schools, City of Baton Rouge, Dad-A-Port, Fathers Matter NOLA, Fathers On A Mission, Rapides Station Community Ministries, Living Water Ministries, Promoting Opportunities for Paternal Support (P.O.P.S.), TrainingGrounds, and Total Community Action. The Louisiana Policy Institute for Children, as part of their *Geaux Far Louisiana* initiative, provided funding and in-kind support for Task Force activities, including costs for listening sessions, data analysis (a portion of which was conducted by Data Samurai), facilitation, and project management.

The Impacts of Fatherhood Engagement

Most fathers want to be involved in their children's lives. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "this involvement is critical for child health and well-being, and it positively affects well-being and health outcomes for both mothers and fathers. Research shows father involvement relates to the well-being of children throughout their youth, beginning with infancy."⁶ The benefits of fatherhood involvement for children begin early. In its meta-analysis of more than 400 research studies on fatherhood involvement, the National Fatherhood Initiative concluded, "Father involvement is associated with a range of physical, emotional/mental, and social benefits related to child well-being



that are above and beyond the benefits to children of involved mothers.”⁷ These benefits for children span their lives and include improved birth outcomes;⁸ cognitive and linguistic skill development,⁹ literacy, and academic performance;¹⁰ overall health; social emotional development, confidence, and self-esteem;¹¹ reduced stress, depressive symptoms, risk-taking behaviors, substance abuse, and unintended pregnancy;¹² and increased likelihood to enter college and find stable employment.¹³ Emerging data in Louisiana based on an initial analysis of recent data from the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH) echo these findings. Researchers have found that **children with involved fathers are 43% more likely**

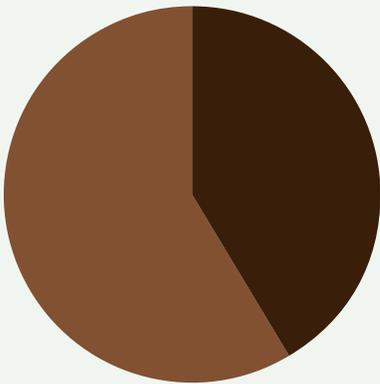
to earn A’s, 33% less likely to repeat a grade,¹⁴ more likely to graduate high school,¹⁵ and more likely to enjoy school and participate in enrichment activities. Research shows that the connection between a father’s involvement and their child’s academic performance persists well into adulthood.¹⁶

Fatherhood engagement also shows positive impacts on the well-being of both fathers and mothers, which is critically important given Louisiana’s maternal health crisis. Researchers have found that fathers who are involved with their children are happier,¹⁷ report improved well-being, show lower rates of depression and higher self-esteem,¹⁸ and are more likely to maintain stable, secure employment.¹⁹ Fatherhood involvement has been shown to improve mothers’ access to prenatal care, reduce smoking during pregnancy,²⁰ reduce the likelihood of postpartum depression,²¹ and reduce maternal stress, particularly for mothers of children with disabilities.²²

A national study on the return on investment of responsible fatherhood programming found that each father who successfully completes a responsible fatherhood program generates \$177,000 in additional social benefits over their lifetime in additional earnings, taxes paid, child support payments, and savings on social programs. The study goes on to calculate an additional \$85,000 per child in benefits for children who have involved fathers and access to quality early care and education.²³ In fiscal year 2025, The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood reported that child support collections from fathers increased by 41.6% in the three months following completion of a responsible fatherhood program.²⁴

\$177,000

lifetime ROI per father who participates in a responsible fatherhood program



41.6%

increase in child support payments from fathers who completed a responsible fatherhood program.

Barriers to Fatherhood Engagement in Louisiana

Most fathers in Louisiana want to play a positive role in their children's lives. And they are capable. **Listening session participants consistently expressed a deep sense of pride and purpose in fatherhood, describing it as one of the most meaningful and defining roles in their lives.** They emphasized that being a father is not simply about financial provision but presence, consistency, emotional availability, modeling strong values, and shaping their children's character, identity, and future opportunities through everyday interactions and long-term guidance.

"Buying things doesn't make you a good father. That makes you a good provider. To become a good father, you must be present in your child's life!"

— *Region 5 Listening Session participant (Lake Charles)*

Too often in Louisiana, however, fathers face barriers that discourage or prevent them from engaging fully in this role with their children. Many fathers who participated in the Task Force's listening sessions and surveys indicated that they feel tremendous economic pressure to provide for their children and that these pressures often negatively impact their ability to be present with their children. Fathers described working long hours, multiple jobs, or unpredictable shifts to meet rising costs of living, especially while paying child support, legal fees, and maintaining separate households. As a result, they said that their schedules and financial demands directly compete with their ability to attend school events, medical appointments,

day-to-day routines, and be more physically and emotionally present. **Nearly half of fathers indicated that mental health is also a significant barrier to being the father they want to be.** These personal challenges are often exacerbated by social and community challenges. Louisiana fathers consistently report being excluded, overlooked, and related to as secondary caregivers by institutions and community systems — from maternity wards and neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) to pediatricians offices, schools, and family courts.

“My ideal situation is not having to work 80 hours a week so I can spend time with my kids, pick them up after school, coach a team, and actually be present.”

— *Region 1 Listening Session participant (New Orleans)*

For fathers who are not married to the mother of their children, contentious relationships between them are often one of the greatest barriers impacting fathers’ involvement in the lives of their children. Louisiana has some of the highest birth rates for unmarried mothers in the nation. Therefore, many fathers begin parenthood outside of marriage, where their legal rights depend not only on biological ties but on formal legal processes.

National research shows unmarried fathers often display strong commitment at the birth of their children, but have difficulty sustaining this involvement over time without supportive policies

and systems, which often requires access to courts.²⁵ Often Louisiana’s legal system exacerbates these challenges. Louisiana’s decentralized family court structure leaves many fathers feeling like it is the luck of the draw if they get a judge who is willing to see the father as an equal parent regarding parenting time with their child. Louisiana fathers and representatives of the legal community and judiciary system agree: the vagueness of existing Louisiana family law statutes and the resulting unpredictability of rulings is a significant barrier for fathers.

“Fathers are not valued as equals in the laws of Louisiana.”

— *Region 9 Listening Session participant (Hammond)*



While *Louisiana Civil Code Article 134* allows courts to award either parent custody by prioritizing 14 statutory factors related to the “best interest of the child,” the lack of explicit statutory guidance allows for significant variance in how these laws are interpreted, even between judges in the same courthouse.²⁶ Courts often still equate stability and continuity of care with the role of the mother, awarding fathers primary custody only when mothers are proven unfit.²⁷ While joint custody has become the “preferred” norm in contested custody cases, equal time remains a structural barrier and mothers are still more likely to be designated the domiciliary parent with fathers subject to child support payments they may not be able to afford. Louisiana’s Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Access and Visitation program staff report the mother is the custodial parent in approximately 93% of the cases they see. This ambiguity frequently results in inconsistent rulings that disproportionately and adversely impact fathers, often forcing them to rely on costly appeals to correct inequitable outcomes and/or discouraging them from engaging with the legal system to seek legal remedies related to custody or visitation schedules. Many fathers simply cannot afford legal representation for these costly proceedings on their own. Without legal guidance, many fathers face default judgments, restricted access to their children, disparate child support orders, and legal misunderstandings that increase family instability and conflict.

Over the past decade, Louisiana courts have seen an uptick in self-representation in family law cases. Fathers, particularly low-income fathers, frequently appear *pro se* (representing themselves), resulting in

difficulty presenting evidence, one-sided parenting plans, limited or supervised visitation, and uneven judgements.²⁸ Too often fathers end up with a custody judgement that limits the parenting time and is difficult to change, due to Louisiana’s *Bergeron* standard and fathers’ lack of understanding of the legal process.²⁹ This absence of representation also interacts with other social determinants, including housing insecurity, employment challenges, prior criminal legal involvement, or unpaid fines, compounding barriers to father involvement in their children’s lives.³⁰ In this context, **the state of fatherhood in Louisiana has been shaped less by paternal motivation and more by structural conditions, especially legal systems that determine whether and how fathers can maintain meaningful roles in their children’s lives.**

“I feel like the whole system is just railroading me, and the harder that I try to be present, the harder it is for me to be present. It’s a lot.”

– *Virtual Listening Session Participant*

Meanwhile, state agencies seeking to increase their engagement with fathers consistently report barriers that include a lack of father-specific data, lack of dedicated funding for fatherhood engagement and fatherhood programming, staffing limitations and overwhelming caseloads, lack of staff training, cultural stigmas and societal norms that discourage fathers, and systemic and environmental barriers related to economic and housing instability, food insecurity, poverty, incarceration, and lack of transportation.



"I struggle in the system with being respected as a dad."

– Region 4 Listening Session participant (Lafayette)

Recommendations

The Louisiana Task Force on Fatherhood Engagement identified seven recommendations to reduce barriers and increase the positive involvement of Louisiana fathers in the lives of their children.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Establish a standing Commission on Fatherhood Engagement that works across state government agencies and partners to identify and advance opportunities for Louisiana to better support the engagement of fathers in the lives of their children and families. The work of the Task Force has only begun to address the opportunities and challenges related to fatherhood engagement in Louisiana. Other states, including Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina, have developed standing commissions on fatherhood.³¹ This Commission can be modeled after the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, which was founded in 1999 and has become a national model.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Implement effective fatherhood programming across state agencies with a focus on supporting effective parenting and partnership between parents beginning during pregnancy. Priorities include:

- A. Requiring annual submission of fatherhood engagement plans and reports for each state agency** overseeing a body of work that requires the regular engagement of families and/or



fathers. This can build on the reports provided to the Task Force in the fall of 2025 and can be managed by the Louisiana Commission on Fatherhood Engagement, once authorized.

- B. Continuing to implement and expand promising programs** currently supported by the State of Louisiana that have robust fatherhood engagement, including [Head Start](#), [Healthy Start](#), [Malachi Dads](#), [Fathers On A Mission](#), and others.
- C. Requiring annual training** for staff of child and family-serving agencies to understand adverse childhood experiences and child trauma, the importance of fatherhood engagement, shared parenting research, effective fatherhood engagement practices, minimizing biases against fathers, and legal requirements related to paternal rights.
- D. Encouraging state agencies to partner with fatherhood engagement programs and groups** to advance trusted and knowledgeable implementation of best practices in fatherhood engagement throughout their work.
- E. Intentionally including fathers from different backgrounds in parent engagement programs, advisory boards, commissions, and leadership roles** focused on children and families.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Improve data collection and usage on fathers and fatherhood engagement across government agencies. Louisiana’s currently available data makes it difficult to strategically address fatherhood engagement. Every government agency engaged with fathers and/or their children should regularly capture, report, and use data on fathers and fatherhood engagement. Louisiana should establish



a statewide family and household data and insights system that standardizes definitions and data collection across families and households, securely integrates data across agencies, and provides accurate data to inform coordinated, evidence-driven policy and better outcomes for children and families. In addition to standard household data, the state should regularly collect and analyze case outcomes in child custody and child support proceedings, capture father contact information on registration forms for child health and education matters, and document fathers' engagement with the workforce development and criminal justice systems to better enable these systems to support fathers' relationships and time with their children.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Dedicate at least \$2.5 million annually in new funding in the state budget specifically for community-based programs to support fatherhood engagement. Fathers need training in parenting, co-parenting, and conflict resolution; support in accessing counseling, peer support networks, legal assistance, housing assistance, and workforce training; help identifying and addressing mental health challenges and legal barriers; and accessing economic opportunities that allow them to provide financially for, be present physically, and emotionally for their children. Community-based organizations are often best positioned to provide this kind of support. Legislatures in states like Ohio and Florida have dedicated \$20 million³² to \$95 million for similar efforts³³ and seen a strong return on investment.³⁴

RECOMMENDATION 5: Improve support for fathers during the perinatal period. The perinatal and early childhood period when parents are learning to parent

sets the tone for parental behavior throughout a child's life. It also offers a unique opportunity to lay a foundation for strong parenting partnerships and the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children as a critical source of emotional guidance and financial support. Louisiana can better support the involvement of fathers from the beginning by:

- A. Promoting more widespread availability of video conferencing and other telehealth options** for early childhood and prenatal visits to accommodate participation of patients and their support system, including expectant fathers who may not be able to be physically present.
- B. Ensuring a child's medical records can be accessed by both parents** from birth.
- C. Requiring training for staff in Labor and Delivery, Maternity Wards, and NICU** on how to create a more welcoming environment and support for both parents, which may include making accommodations for both parents to comfortably be present, sharing pertinent information with both parents, and making resources and literature available for both parents.
- D. Promoting paternity declarations** to make it easier for fathers to establish paternity by requiring private insurance and Medicaid coverage for paternity tests, requiring hospitals to post information about the paternity declaration process and the [Putative Father Registry](#) on birthing and postpartum units, and requiring the Louisiana Department of Health to develop materials for their use.

E. Piloting postpartum depression screening initiatives for fathers alongside mothers, building on the state’s use of the Caregiver Perinatal Depression Screening in pediatric practices through the Louisiana Perinatal Quality Collaborative and other recent initiatives to address Louisiana’s maternal mental health crisis and move toward the Collaborative Care Model recommended by the Louisiana Perinatal Health Task Force.³⁵

F. Extending paid family medical leave to more Louisiana fathers to support parent-child bonding and long-term employment following the birth or adoption of a child, beginning with public school teachers, following the lead of states like Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee.³⁶

G. Adopting “Dad Doula” programming in Louisiana and ensuring insurance coverage for it to train men as doulas who specifically support fellow fathers through the birthing process and early stages of becoming a parent. To do this, the Louisiana Department of Health should be charged with the creation or adoption of a “Dad Doula” training curriculum that can be offered by Louisiana doula training programs and establish requirements for “Dad Doulas” to be registered by the Louisiana Doula Registry Board and eligible for insurance coverage. Similar programs like [Dad Doula](#) and [Doulas4Dads](#) are already offered in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington, DC, and have shown promising results in decreasing stress and depressive symptoms among fathers and increasing their mindfulness as a foundation for effective parenting and partnering with the other parent.³⁷

H. Encouraging perinatal health care providers to offer parenting and partnership in parenting classes to expectant parents that go beyond the birthing process to lay the foundation for effective communication, conflict resolution, and partnering effectively as parents, regardless of if the new parents are married or not.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Establish housing assistance and shelter priorities specifically for fathers with minor children. Nearly one in four Louisiana fathers surveyed indicated that housing assistance would be a most helpful resource to support them as fathers. Yet, in Louisiana, most shelters and housing assistance programs for families focus on mothers with children. Historically, federal housing assistance programs have discouraged fathers from being named on the lease or recognized as a part of the household for fear of making families ineligible for assistance. Louisiana can proactively establish policies that rectify this without taking anything away from mothers.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Improve policies and practices to ensure fair and equal opportunities for fathers in child custody, visitation, and family court proceedings. As noted above, some of the greatest structural barriers fathers face to greater involvement in the lives of their children are related to Louisiana law and the operation of its family courts. Louisiana fathers who have engaged with DCFS and family courts have consistently and urgently expressed a need for change to ensure clear custody expectations, predictable parenting time, fewer court appearances, and reduced legal costs by:

A. Codifying a stronger presumption of equal shared physical custody in law as the default in Louisiana

child custody cases before weighing Article 134 factors related to the “best interest of the child.” While Louisiana law has moved toward a presumption of equal custody, in practice, many courts often still equate stability and continuity of care with the role of the mother.³⁸ Addressing this bias requires the Louisiana Legislature to modernize Louisiana custody law by creating a structured, evidence-based presumption of equal shared physical custody as in the best interest of the child, while preserving judicial discretion and prioritizing child safety.

B. Revising Louisiana’s Civil Code to reduce judicial ambiguity and address inconsistencies in how judges weigh Article 134 factors associated with the best interest of the child by adopting provisions from the [National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges’ Model Code on Domestic and Family Violence](#).³⁹ Using this Model Code would reduce subjective interpretation and could strengthen the presumption of shared equal physical custody as in the best interest of the child by requiring judges to account for specific behaviors and contexts, ensuring that rulings are based on evidence rather than judicial inclination. By reducing judicial ambiguity through the adoption of Model Code frameworks, the state can ensure that custody rulings are consistent, equitable, and conducive to maximizing the involvement of fathers without risking the safety of children or mothers. Most states have already adopted parts of the Model Code, specifically regarding child custody presumptions and custody definitions.

C. Clarifying and codifying the *Bergeron* standard to allow fathers to more easily demonstrate a change in circumstances that would allow a change in child custody arrangements. For fathers seeking to increase their parenting time, the *Bergeron* standard establishes a high burden of proof to modify existing custody orders. Currently, this standard exists only in case law, making it difficult to apply consistently. The Louisiana State Law Institute is drafting a codification of this standard into a new *Louisiana Civil Code Article 138*, which follows through on the Louisiana Legislature’s passage of [HR 242](#) in 2022 to ensure fathers understand exactly what is required to petition for increased time, and should limit the *Bergeron* burden to a *three-year* period so fathers aren’t permanently “locked out” of their children’s lives due to a single ruling made years prior.⁴⁰

D. Exploring federally allowable uses of Title IV-D funds related to paternity and child support establishment, along with non-IV-D funding sources, to support fathers’ engagement.⁴¹ IV-D resources may be a significant tool to improve fatherhood involvement, reduce conflict, enhance stability for children, increase child support collections, and save money. In case-by-case assessments, parenting-time services may be integrated with support establishment

E. Establishing dedicated staffing at the Louisiana Supreme Court to advance consistent and evidence-based father engagement in family courts across Louisiana. In Louisiana’s decentralized family court system, the handling of family law matters varies significantly by

parish and by local practice. As a result, fathers report facing judges they consider biased and see significantly different outcomes for similar cases in different jurisdictions. As the state's leading entity responsible for issuing guidance to district courts, the Louisiana Supreme Court is well-positioned to promote more consistent practices regarding fathers and family court proceedings across the state. A dedicated fatherhood focused staff member there and in larger local courts could be an important step.

F. Requiring family court judges to provide litigants without representation information about proceedings and the impacts of decisions or rulings on their potential future claims related

to their children. In 1969, *Boykin v. Alabama*, established that guilty pleas in criminal cases must be made voluntarily and intelligently, emphasizing that defendants must be informed of their constitutional rights and must knowingly waive those rights for a plea to be valid. No similar measure exists in family law, even though many fathers end up with a *Bergeron* standard that makes it very difficult for them to modify child custody arrangements later. As a result, too many fathers end up with limited access to their children simply due to their lack of understanding of the legal consequences of the proceedings.

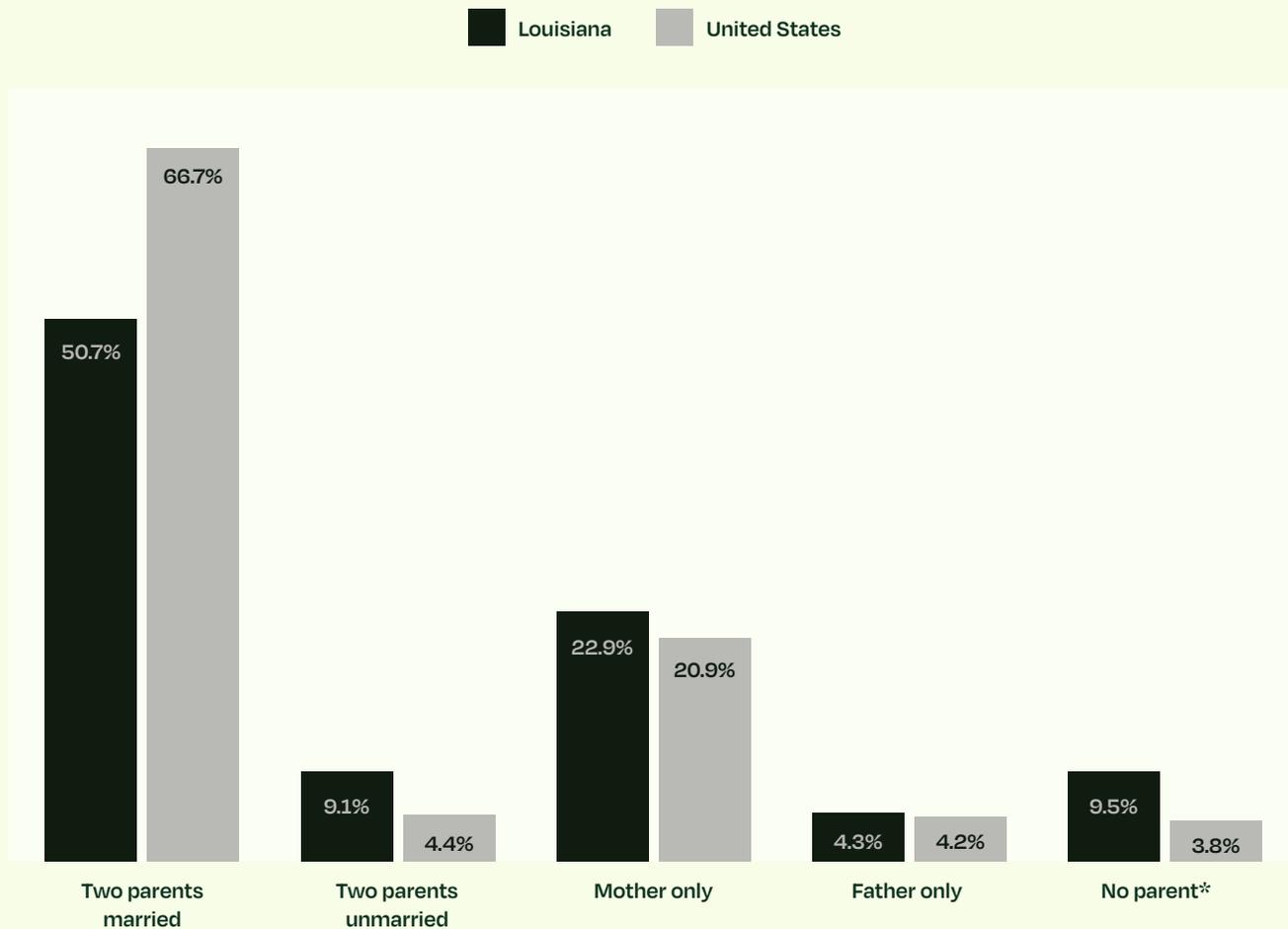


Introduction

Louisiana is home to an estimated 334,000 fathers of children under age 18.⁴² According to a [2020 analysis](#) of 2013-2018 birth certificate data completed by the Louisiana Department of Health, approximately 60,000 children are born in Louisiana each year. Forty-six and a half percent of them were born to unmarried mothers. Nearly one in six – 15% – of birth certificates did not include paternal information or acknowledgment of paternity. The average age of the father at the time of birth was 30 years-old.

According to [2023 American Community Survey](#) data, of the 543,141 Louisiana households with a child under the age of 18, 275,485 (50.7%) are led by a married couple and an additional 49,264 (9.1%) are led by a cohabitating couple. The remaining 40% are raised primarily by a single parent: 23,546 (4.3%) are led by a single father with no spouse present; 124,328 (22.9%) are led by a single mother with no spouse or partner present. **For more than one third of Louisiana households with children under age 18, there is no father present.**

Living Arrangements of Children, 2023



*In Louisiana, 45,794 (8.4%) are grandparent-led households in which grandparents are raising their grandchildren. Comparing [Louisiana \(2023\)](#)

Numerous research studies have shown that the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children beginning during the prenatal period contributes to improved social, emotional, cognitive, and language development, self-esteem, positive behavior, mental health, physical health, and overall well-being among their children.⁴⁵ Research has also linked fathers'

involvement with their children to improved health and well-being among both fathers and mothers and stronger relationship outcomes among parenting couples.⁴⁶ Louisiana's fathers feel a deep sense of pride and purpose in fatherhood. They describe it as one of the most meaningful and defining roles in their lives.⁴⁷



Yet, Louisiana’s fathers face numerous systemic barriers to being involved in the lives of their children. The challenges are significant. Louisiana:

- Ranks 50th out of the 50 states for its percentage of out-of-wedlock births and single mother households, which can present barriers to fatherhood involvement early on, as described further below;⁴⁸
- Ranks 48th on Wallet Hub’s “Best States for Working Dads” list;⁴⁹
- Ranks 49th on a recent analysis of Child and Family Service Reviews for engaging fathers in case planning in child welfare;⁵⁰

- Has one of the highest male incarceration rates of any state in the nation;⁴ and
- Has over 56% of recent fathers whose highest level of education is a high school diploma or GED or below.⁵²

Recognizing these challenges, a group of fathers and fatherhood-focused organizations came together as part of Geaux Far Louisiana to draw attention to this issue and seek support from the Louisiana Legislature in developing solutions.

During the 2025 Louisiana Legislative Session, the Louisiana Legislature passed Senate Concurrent

Resolution 9 ([SCR 9](#)) to create and provide for the Task Force on Fatherhood Engagement to study how Louisiana can increase the engagement of fathers in the lives of their children, to research best practices, and develop recommendations for each state agency to promote the full inclusion of fathers and the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. Task Force members included:

- Andre Apparicio, *Founder, Dad-A-Port (Vice Chair)*
- Robert Ayala, *Founder, Data Samurai*
- Todd Battiste, *Senior Vice President, Education & Youth Initiatives, United Way of Southeast Louisiana (Secretary)*
- Ted Beasley, *Deputy Chief of Communications, Louisiana Department of Education*
- Darrell Creecy, *Executive Director, Fathers Matter NOLA*
- Bantu Gross, Ph.D., *Program Director, Fathers Matter NOLA*
- Corey Himes, *Senior Policy Analyst, Louisiana Policy Institute for Children*
- Jamie Lee, *Undersecretary, Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections*
- Mark Morrison, *Block Grant Coordinator, Bureau of Family Health, Louisiana Department of Health*
- Yazan Rantisi, *Policy Director, Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services*
- Melanie Richardson, *Co-Founder and Executive Director, TrainingGrounds*
- Levar Robinson, *Founder and Executive Director, Fathers On A Mission (Co-Chair)*

- Marcus Thomas, *Director of Early Childhood Systems, Office of Governor Jeff Landry (Co-Chair)*
- Kahree Wahid, *Director of Louisiana Head Start Collaboration Office, Louisiana Department of Education*
- Jeff Williams, *Founder and CEO, The Williams Group*
- Jolie Williamson, *Executive Director, Louisiana Children's Cabinet, Office of Governor Jeff Landry*
- LaJon Wright, *Founder and Director, Promoting Opportunities for Paternal Support (P.O.P.S.)*

The Task Force met nine times between August 2025 and February 2026 on the following dates:

- Wednesday, August 27, 2025, 12:30 - 2:30 pm
- Monday, September 15, 2025, 9:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Wednesday, September 24, 2025, 9:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Friday, October 17, 2025, 9:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Tuesday, October 28, 2025, 12:30 - 2:30 pm
- Friday, November 14, 2025, 9:30 am - 12:30 pm in Senate Committee Room E
- Monday, December 15, 2025, 9:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Tuesday, January 20, 2026, 9:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Tuesday, February 24, 2026, 10 am - 12 pm in Senate Committee Room E

Each meeting took place in the Governor's Press Room on the 4th Floor of the Louisiana State Capitol, unless otherwise indicated. Meetings included a

review of extant data, research, and best practices, public comment, and presentations from content experts as well as state agencies who work with fathers. Early on, the Task Force agreed to a set of principles to guide its work. These principles, which can serve as guiding principles for fatherhood engagement work in Louisiana, are as follows:

- **Reframe negative narratives about fathers** to narratives of respect and dignity
- Relate to **fathers as whole people** and whole human beings, not just providers of financial security or physical safety for their families
- Be **family-centered**, recognizing the impact of fathers on their families
- **Center the lived experience** of Louisiana fathers throughout our work
- **Build partnerships** and collaboration across communities, agencies, and organizations
- Include and address **what fathers need across marital and parenting structures**, recognizing that fathers may not be married to the mother or live in the same household as their children, but fathers also often include significant father figures (step fathers, uncles, grandfathers, or other community mentors) who play a significant role in the life of a child
- **Start early** – during pregnancy and at childbirth – to build the foundation for fatherhood engagement
- Make **Louisiana father-friendly across systems** of health, economics, education, law, etc.

The following state agencies presented to the Task Force on their current and planned fatherhood

engagement efforts and shared data they collect related to fatherhood engagement: Louisiana Children's Cabinet, Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services, Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana Department of Health, Louisiana Office of Head Start Collaboration, Louisiana Supreme Court, and Louisiana Works.

The Task Force also hosted nine listening sessions that engaged 153 fathers across Louisiana in (1) Learning about the work of the Task Force, (2) Sharing their experiences and perspectives to inform the Task Force's work, report, and recommendations; and (3) Connecting to information and resources in their community. Listening sessions took place between October 18th and December 6th, 2025, in partnership with local leaders and organizations in Alexandria, Baton Rouge, Hammond, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Monroe, New Orleans, Shreveport, and online virtually. Listening Sessions were hosted by Task Force members and community organizations, many of which provided significant in-kind support to the effort, including: Beacon Light Baptist Church of Hammond, Calcasieu Parish Schools, City of Baton Rouge, Dad-APort, Fathers Matter NOLA, Fathers On A Mission, Rapides Station Community Ministries, Living Water Ministries, Promoting Opportunities for Paternal Support (P.O.P.S.), Total Community Action, and TrainingGrounds. Listening sessions used a common facilitators guide with prompts focused on ideal fatherhood engagement, resources and support fathers have found helpful, challenges and barriers fathers face, and how Louisiana can better support fathers in being involved in the lives of their children. The Task Force Data and Research Work

Group coded the listening session transcripts using a structured qualitative analysis process to identify recurring themes and insights across regions.

In addition to these listening sessions, fathers across the state were invited to complete an in-depth online survey about their experiences. Between October 3 and December 6, 2025, 547 fathers responded to the survey, which asked questions about time spent with their children, their experiences with state systems and financial responsibilities related to their children, and barriers to greater involvement. The survey was developed and managed by Data Samurai and promoted through Task Force meetings, Task Force members, and the agencies and organizations with which they are affiliated via multiple e-mail blasts, social media, and events. Listening session participants were also asked to complete the survey following each session.

The analysis of the listening session and survey data was shared with the Task Force at its December

2025 and January 2026 meetings and helped inform this report and recommendations.

Task Force activities were coordinated by the Director of Early Childhood Systems in the Office of Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry and supported with facilitation, writing, research, and project management by ResourceFull Consulting. The Louisiana Policy Institute for Children provided funding and in-kind support for Task Force activities, including costs for listening sessions, data analysis, and the involvement of ResourceFull Consulting. Additional in-kind support for data collection and community engagement was provided by Beacon Light Baptist Church of Hammond, Calcasieu Parish Schools, City of Baton Rouge, Dad-A-Port, Data Samurai, Fathers Matter NOLA, Fathers On A Mission, Rapides Station Community Ministries, Living Water Ministries, Promoting Opportunities for Paternal Support (P.O.P.S.), and TrainingGrounds.





Department of
Children &
Family Services
Building a Stronger Louisiana



Research on the Impacts of Fatherhood Engagement

Most fathers want to be involved in their children's lives. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "this involvement is critical for child health and well-being, and it positively affects well-being and health outcomes for both mothers and fathers. Research shows father involvement relates to the well-being of children throughout their youth, beginning with infancy."⁵³

As the Advisory Committee on Greater Fatherhood Involvement to the Joint State Government Commission of the Pennsylvania General Assembly noted in its [January 2024 report](#), "Father involvement encompasses a multifaceted and dynamic participation of fathers in the lives of their children, extending beyond mere presence to active engagement with and influence on his children." Fatherhood involvement does not require a father to live in the same household as their child full-time. It goes beyond mere presence or financial support to encompass emotional, psychological, and developmental contributions that are crucial to a child's well-being.

Impacts on Children's Health and Well-Being

The benefits of fatherhood involvement begin early. In its meta-analysis of more than 400 research studies on fatherhood involvement, the National Fatherhood Initiative concluded, "Father involvement is associated with a range of physical, emotional/mental, and social benefits related to child well-being that are above and beyond the benefits to children of involved mothers."⁵⁴ Families in which the father is involved have lower rates of births that are low weight and very low weight, preterm, and small for gestational age.⁵⁵ Father involvement early on in a child's life positively impacts cognitive and linguistic skills and school performance.⁵⁶ These impacts persist throughout childhood and into adolescence: father involvement can help improve children's social emotional development, confidence, and self-esteem, and reduce risk-taking behaviors.⁵⁷

In fact, researchers analyzing data from the United States National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health found that adolescents who reported higher levels of father-adolescent warmth, communication, time together, academic expectations, and relationship satisfaction also reported significantly higher levels of self-rated general health in young adulthood. Adolescents also reported significantly higher levels of optimism and romantic relationship quality and significantly lower levels of stress, depressive symptoms, nicotine dependence, substance abuse systems, and unintended pregnancy.⁵⁸ More than a generation ago, researchers concluded that **children who feel a closeness to their father are twice as likely to enter**

college or find stable employment after high school, 75% less likely to have a teen birth, 80% less likely to spend time in jail, and half as likely to experience multiple depression symptoms.⁵⁹

In Louisiana, an initial analysis of recent data from the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) echoes these findings. The NSCH provides data on multiple, intersecting aspects of children's lives—including physical and mental health, access to and quality of health care, and the child's family, neighborhood, school, and social context. Preliminary data presented to the Task Force by a representative from the Louisiana Department of Health suggest fatherhood engagement may have positive impacts on the overall health status of their children, the likelihood a child will flourish, the frequency of their child's medical visits, their child's screen time, housing security, food sufficiency, the likelihood the child will have mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral problems, the child's school readiness, the frequency with which an adult tells stories or sing songs to the child, the child's engagement in school, and disruptions to parental employment due to child care challenges.⁶⁰

Impacts on Children's Cognitive Development and Academic Performance

Positively involved fathers can increase their child's development of cognitive skills: skills related to perception, learning, memory, understanding, awareness, reasoning, judgment, intuition, and language. Children under age two who have experienced positive contributions from their

fathers have shown a higher level of cognitive functioning than those children who do not receive these contributions.⁶¹ Studies have found increases in children's literacy for those whose fathers read to them, regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Researchers have also found that fathers who are completely absent from their children's lives can result in impaired cognitive function and less success in school.⁶² Studies have found a positive correlation between father involvement and enhanced academic outcomes.⁶³ Father involvement is strongly associated with improved student outcomes, even when controlling for race, income, and household structure. **Children with involved fathers are 43% more likely to earn A's, 33% less likely to repeat a grade,⁶⁴ more likely to graduate high school,⁶⁵ and more likely to enjoy school and participate in enrichment activities.** Academic engagement improves even when fathers live apart but remain involved with their children.⁶⁶ The connection between a father's involvement and their child's academic performance persists well into adulthood.⁶⁷

Impacts on the Well-Being of Fathers

When fathers are involved in their children's lives, researchers have found that their own well-being improves. The responsibility of fatherhood has been shown to decrease risky behaviors among fathers and increase the likelihood that fathers maintain stable, secure employment.⁶⁸ Researchers found that fathers with children reported greater happiness, subjective well-being, and greater satisfaction with caregiving and interacting with their children than did

mothers.⁶⁹ Father involvement with preschool-aged children is associated with lower rates of depression. The frequency of a father's involvement with their children during the middle childhood years was also found to increase the father's self-esteem.⁷⁰

Impacts on the Well-Being of Mothers

Father involvement also has important implications for the health and well-being of mothers when both a father and a mother are involved with parenting. This, in turn, benefits the development of their children. When fathers are involved during pregnancy, mothers are more likely to receive prenatal care and less likely to smoke.⁷¹ After birth, when a mother is satisfied with father involvement, the likelihood of postpartum depression is reduced,⁷² which also benefits the newborn.⁷³ Mothers of children with disabilities often experienced a reduction in maternal stress when fathers offered support and understanding through active parenting and family roles. Active fathers can also serve as a buffer of the negative consequences of parenting a child with autism and other disabilities on mothers' stress, depression, and parenting quality.⁷⁴

The Fiscal Costs of Father Absence and Return on Investment

The cost of father absence in Louisiana is significant. It is a significant driver of state expenditures across numerous areas, including:

- Public safety, as father absence has been linked to increased risk-taking behaviors among youth and greater likelihood of criminal legal system involvement;

- Public assistance programs, as engaged fathers are more likely to maintain secure employment and provide stable child support, reducing his children and families' reliance on state and federal public assistance programs.
- Education and workforce readiness, as children with involved fathers perform better academically and are less likely to repeat a grade in school. Long-term, this adversely impacts the state's workforce competitiveness and limits its tax base.

A recent study found that the federal government spent \$154.2 billion in fiscal year 2018 to assist father-absent households through social programs like Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).⁷⁵

A national study on the return on investment of responsible fatherhood programming found that each father who successfully completes a responsible fatherhood program generates \$177,000 in additional social benefits over their lifetime in additional earnings, taxes paid, child support payments, and savings on social programs. The study goes on to calculate an additional \$85,000 per child in benefits for children who have involved fathers and access to quality early care and education.⁷⁶ For fiscal year 2025, the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood reported a 41.6% increase in child support payments among fathers who completed their responsible fatherhood programs.



Barriers to Greater Fatherhood Engagement in Louisiana

Most fathers want to play a positive role in their children’s lives. And they are capable. Too often, however, they face barriers that discourage or prevent them from engaging fully with their children. These barriers can be categorized using a socio-ecological model first developed by American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner: individual, interpersonal, community, organizational, and policy.

“Buying things doesn’t make you a good father. That makes you a good provider. To become a good father, you must be present in your child’s life.”

— Region 5 Listening Session participant (Lake Charles)

Methodology

The Task Force identified the following barriers through discussions at its Task Force meetings, presentations from state agencies, and input from fathers across the state. The Task Force employed a mixed-methods research design to capture the breadth and complexity of fathers' experiences across Louisiana through regional listening sessions and a statewide survey. A statewide online survey was conducted from October 3 to December 6, 2025 and received 547 responses from dads across Louisiana. Questions included topics on custody, parenting time, employment and financial security, child support, mental and emotional health, access to supports, and experiences navigating state and local systems. In addition, the Task Force convened nine focus group-style listening sessions, which were held across the Louisiana Department of Health regions, including Alexandria, Baton Rouge, Hammond, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Monroe, New Orleans, Shreveport, and one virtual statewide session via Zoom. The Task Force engaged with approximately 153 fathers during these sessions, which were structured as open forums for discussion that covered a range of topics, including fatherhood and co-parenting, employment, and navigating public systems. Transcripts from all listening sessions were coded using a codebook, and recurring major themes and shared learnings across regions were identified.

Fathers' Perceptions of their Role

Across listening sessions and survey responses, **Louisiana fathers consistently described fatherhood as a defining part of their identity and one of the most**

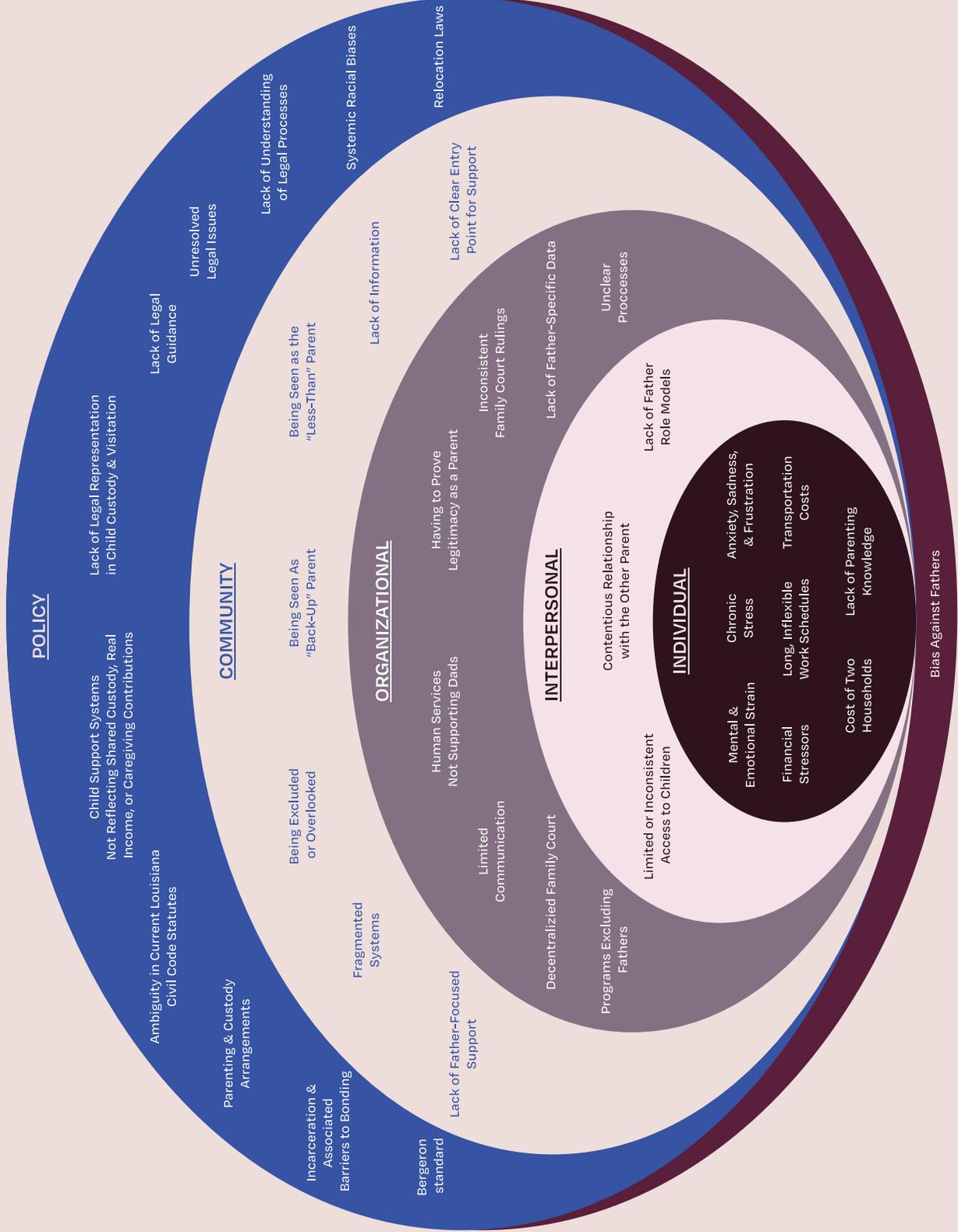
meaningful roles in their lives. Fathers emphasized that their role extends far beyond financial support to include emotional presence, guidance, and modeling values such as accountability and respect. Many described intentional efforts to break generational cycles of absence, trauma, and emotional distance, often referencing faith communities, mentors, and peer networks as sources of growth and accountability. Survey findings strongly reinforced these perspectives. More than 95% of fathers surveyed agreed that emotional presence, quality time, teaching and guidance, and supporting children's education are essential components of being a good father. Collectively, survey data indicate that fathers overwhelmingly view themselves as active, essential caregivers rather than secondary figures in their children's lives.

"The greatest thing about being a dad is just being there to love and care for them and teaching them things"

— *Region 4 Listening Session participant (Lafayette)*



Socio-Ecological Barriers Facing Louisiana Fathers



Individual

Father's Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

Mental and emotional strain emerged as a cross-cutting issue among Louisiana fathers across survey and listening session responses. In listening sessions, fathers described chronic stress related to financial pressure, court involvement, grief, relationship breakdowns, and limited access to their children. Many spoke about feeling pressure to appear strong while coping internally with deep frustration, sadness, or other mental health-related issues, such as anxiety. Survey findings echoed these experiences. About two-thirds of survey respondents reported experiencing some type of stress, sadness, or worry regularly. Nearly half reported that emotional challenges sometimes or regularly interfere with them being the father they want to be. Fathers who rarely or never see their children reported high stress at nearly twice the rate of those who see their children daily. At the same time, about one-third of all Louisiana fathers reported lacking meaningful resources or access to mental health support, highlighting a gap between need and available resources.

"I needed therapy to navigate the pressure and the mental weight I was carrying, and to work through feelings I had never expressed before."

— *Region 1 Listening Session participant (New Orleans)*

Economic and Financial Challenges

Financial stressors were consistently raised by fathers as one of the largest barriers to ongoing engagement with their children. In listening sessions across regions, fathers spoke of the conflict between needing to work to meet their financial obligations and also being physically present in their children's daily lives. Long or inflexible work schedules, transportation costs, and the expense of maintaining two separate households (for many fathers) also created barriers to involvement for fathers. Nearly 60% of fathers surveyed reported that work schedules interfere with the time they want to spend with their children. While fathers who reported they have a bachelor's degree or higher were more likely to report daily contact with their children than fathers with lower educational attainment, they also were more likely to report work schedules as a barrier. Work schedules were also a more common barrier for fathers of young children (63% of fathers whose children are all under age 5) than for fathers with only adult children (47%). Over 34% of fathers surveyed indicated that assistance in education, job training, and finding employment would be most helpful to them as fathers.

"Being able to leave work at work and come home to be a dad means having present, active, intentional time with your child"

— *Region 1 Listening Session participant (New Orleans)*

“My ideal situation is not having to work 80 hours a week so I can spend time with my kids, pick them up after school, coach a team, and actually be present.”

— *Region 1 Listening Session participant (New Orleans)*

Lack of Knowledge of How to Parent

Children don't come with a manual. And men don't often get much support in learning how to be a father. Some fathers did not grow up with their fathers and don't always see role models of good fathers. More than two out of every five survey respondents indicated that parenting classes would be most helpful to them as a father.

“When I first had children, I didn't know how to be a dad, and I was struggling in a lot of ways. So having resources like Fathers Matters, Dad-A-Port, Geaux Far, and folks that lift up dads really helped.”

— *Virtual Listening Session Participant*

Interpersonal

Contentious relationships with the mother of their children are often one of the greatest barriers impacting fathers' involvement in the lives of their children. Louisiana has some of the highest rates of children born out of wedlock and growing up in a single parent household in the nation.⁷⁷ Listening session data revealed that many fathers have limited or inconsistent access to their children. A large percentage of fathers participating in listening sessions reported having to go to court to receive

parenting time. Focus groups conducted with fathers in 2018 by the Louisiana Department of Health found that many single fathers had contentious relationships with the mother of their children.⁷⁸ The quality of this relationship was often the biggest factor in a father's ability to be present in the lives of their children. The report concluded that helping parents develop healthy and respectful relationships even when they are no longer coupled, could be a key to better parenting and more male engagement.

Many fathers also have to overcome the lack of a presence of their own father growing up. While numerous fathers participating in listening sessions identified this as a motivation to be an involved father, they also talked about the challenge of not growing up with a role model on how to be a father.

“I was raised by a single mom and I've always said I'm not going to be [the same as] that parent that was never present [for me].”

— *Region 5 Listening Session participant (Lake Charles)*

Community

In listening sessions and surveys, Louisiana fathers consistently expressed an experience of bias against fathers when it comes to parenting. They report being seen as the “less-than” parent or “back-up parent” to mothers by institutions and community systems. In maternity wards, NICU's, pediatrician's offices, child care centers, schools, and beyond, Louisiana's fathers consistently report being excluded, overlooked, and related to as secondary caregivers.

"I struggle in the system with being respected as a dad."

— *Region 4 Listening Session participant (Lafayette)*

Too often, they face biases that fathers – particularly Black fathers – are not around or interested in being involved in their children's lives. Following a series of focus groups with African-American fathers across Louisiana in 2018, the Louisiana Department of Health Bureau of Family Health concluded, "Stereotypes that Black men don't want to be involved in their children's lives are far off target. Overall, even estranged participants wanted to be involved in the lives of their children. Fathers see themselves as playing an important role in the healthy development of their children. Men say they are more involved in the housework and day-to-day minutia of child care (diapers, feeding, school trips) than were men of previous generations. Many said they were involved in the prenatal care visits during the partner's pregnancy and were there when the baby was born."⁷⁹

In listening sessions, Louisiana fathers consistently reported a disconnect between the support they need to remain active in their children's lives and the support that is accessible to them. Fathers spoke to fragmented systems, a lack of information, and supports that are often not designed with fathers in mind. They also highlighted the lack of a clear entry point for support that is coordinated and father-focused, including legal guidance, mental health services, and peer support.

In listening sessions and survey responses, Louisiana fathers consistently emphasized the importance of informal support networks, including family, friends, faith communities, mentors, and community spaces. These relationships were often described as more accessible and responsive than formal systems or community resources, particularly when fathers felt excluded or discouraged by public agencies. Survey responses confirmed these sentiments. Nearly three in every four fathers surveyed (74%) said they get support from family, almost two-thirds (61%) from friends or peers, and almost half (42%) look to faith communities for informal support and guidance. At the same time, a strong interest in structured support remains. A combined 85% of fathers said they would participate or might participate in fatherhood programs, with particular interest in mentoring, mental health support, legal education, and peer connection. These findings underscore the opportunity to strengthen service navigation through father-centered, community-based approaches.



Organizational

Fathers want to and can play an important role in their children's lives, but too often human services programs have not focused on supporting dads. According to a 2018 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Informational Memorandum,

"It is commonly recognized that numerous aspects of current child welfare, child support, and family assistance, and the broader human services ecosystem have resulted in consequences that create reticence for fathers to come forward and claim paternity or engage with systems where paternity has been established. In most instances, child welfare, child support enforcement, and family assistance have largely been compliance-oriented systems that carry a threat of punitive action, including sanctions as strong as arrest, jail time, and permanent loss of parental rights to a child. These systems have not historically been organized around facilitating and incentivizing positive behavior change; and historically have not created cultures of engagement that are likely to encourage paternal involvement. With this in mind, ACF calls upon

family services agencies to ensure that fathers feel welcome, supported, heard, and able to participate as fully as circumstances permit, and in accordance with applicable law, in all programs and services."⁸⁰

— U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

These sentiments were echoed by Louisiana fathers in the Bureau of Family Health's 2018 research, which found that participating men believe that many social services policies are skewed in favor of women (particularly pregnant ones) and children, rather than designed to keep families intact and effective co-parenting possible.⁸¹

In the Task Force's listening sessions, fathers across all regions described challenging interactions with courts, schools, hospitals, and social service agencies, often feeling marginalized or required to prove their legitimacy as parents. Listening session participants emphasized inconsistent rulings, unclear processes, limited communication, and systems that feel adversarial rather than supportive, contributing to conflict and emotional strain.

In many instances, programs designed to support families appear to exclude fathers. In listening sessions, fathers reported that many emergency family shelters in Louisiana only accept women and their children and exclude fathers. The federal Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) makes no mention of fathers and seems to exclude them in its name

even as it seeks to influence lifetime nutrition and health behaviors during the critical perinatal and early childhood period.

Meanwhile, Louisiana's decentralized family court structure leaves many fathers feeling like it is the luck of the draw if they get a judge who is willing to see the father as an equal parent regarding parenting time with their child. The Task Force survey found that among Louisiana fathers that had direct involvement with Louisiana's family courts, fewer than two in 10 reported that their concerns were addressed effectively. Experiences with DCFS followed a similar pattern – 65% of fathers who interacted with DCFS reported they were dissatisfied with their experiences. Current challenges related to the court structure and family law in Louisiana are discussed in greater detail in the Policy section below.

In their reports to the Task Force, state agencies also identified consistent barriers they face to greater fatherhood engagement. These include a lack of father-specific data, lack of dedicated funding for fatherhood engagement and fatherhood programming, staffing limitations and overwhelming caseloads, lack of staff training, cultural stigmas and societal norms that discourage fathers from being involved and/or seeing supports to further their involvement with their children, and systemic and environmental barriers related to economic or housing instability, food insecurity, poverty, incarceration, and lack of transportation. These findings were echoed in the Task Force's survey: nearly one in four fathers indicated a need for

housing assistance and over 15% indicated that transportation assistance would be most helpful to them as fathers.

Policy

In its analysis of the Task Force's survey and listening session data, the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children concluded, "Findings from the statewide fatherhood engagement survey and listening sessions resoundingly demonstrate that fathers in Louisiana care about and are invested in their children and define fatherhood as a core part of their identities. Qualitative and quantitative data also paint a clear picture of systemic and structural barriers that fathers face and that impact the ability of fathers to be fully and equally engaged in their children's lives."⁸²

Many Louisiana fathers, particularly low-income, noncustodial, and non-domiciliary fathers, encounter significant legal and structural barriers that impede their ability to be fully present in their children's lives.

"I feel like the whole system is just railroading me, and the harder that I try to be present, the harder it is for me to be present. It's a lot."

– *Virtual Listening Session Participant*

Ambiguity in current Louisiana civil code statutes

With Louisiana's birth rates for unmarried mothers persistently above the national average for over a decade, many fathers begin parenthood outside of marriage, where their legal rights depend not only

on biological ties but on formal legal processes. Children living in single-parent households, which is over 40% statewide, often have a nonresident parent, usually the father, whose involvement is mediated by custody, visitation, and support orders determined within Louisiana's family law code.⁸³

National research suggests unmarried fathers often display strong commitment at the birth of their children, but involvement is difficult to sustain without supportive policies and systems, which often requires access to courts. Many Louisiana fathers similarly enter parenthood motivated and engaged but face legal and structural barriers that create distance over time.⁸⁴

Parenting time and custody arrangements emerged as some of the most significant challenges across the survey and listening sessions. Louisiana fathers described barriers to maintaining stable relationships with their children due to contentious co-parenting dynamics, inconsistent court rulings, high legal costs, and policies that limit access even when fathers are seeking involvement. Many emphasized that custody designations and relocation laws create unequal decision-making power and destabilize children's routines. Survey data illustrate the scope and consequences of these barriers. While 60% of fathers reported seeing their children every day, 14% reported seeing them less than once per week or not at all. Fathers with limited time or no custody reported higher dissatisfaction with parenting time; 68% of fathers with visitation only and 65% of fathers with no custody reported being very dissatisfied with parenting time. These patterns highlight the strong

relationship between custody arrangements, access, and fathers' sense of engagement.

Feedback provided to the Task Force by members and leaders of the Louisiana legal community and judiciary system identified a critical systemic barrier to father engagement: the vagueness of existing family law statutes and the resulting unpredictability of rulings. While Louisiana law prioritizes the "best interest of the child," the lack of explicit statutory guidance allows for significant variance in how these laws are interpreted. This ambiguity frequently results in inconsistent rulings that disproportionately impact fathers, often forcing them to rely on costly appeals to correct inequitable outcomes.

"[People ask me] why are you not in your child's life? I don't have enough money to fight for it! It's not that I don't want to be in it."

— *Region 8 Listening Session participant (Monroe)*

Current statutes provide a list of factors for determining the best interest of the child.⁸⁵ However, legal professionals reported to the Task Force that without stricter definitions or mandatory weighing mechanisms, the application of these factors varies significantly, often between judges within the same courthouse. This unpredictability discourages fathers from engaging with the legal system and amplifies the challenges they face when seeking legal remedies, such as establishing custody or enforcing visitation schedules.

Lack of legal representation in child custody and visitation

In Louisiana, these challenges are intensified by a child welfare and family law system in which legal representation is highly imbalanced. While parents involved in Child in Need of Care (CINC) proceedings are entitled to counsel through the Louisiana Indigent Defender Program, parents are not entitled to representation with civil legal issues, which include paternity, custody, visitation, and child support. Many parents simply cannot afford legal representation on their own. The consequences are significant. Without legal guidance, family lawyers and fathers across Louisiana report that many fathers face default judgments, restricted access to their children, disparate child support orders, and legal misunderstandings that increase family instability and conflict. This absence of representation also interacts with other social determinants, including housing insecurity, employment challenges, prior criminal legal involvement, or unpaid fines, compounding barriers to fathers' involvement in their children's lives.⁸⁶ Unresolved civil legal issues often prevent fathers from establishing legal paternity, securing visitation rights, modifying child support, or advocating for their relationship with their children.⁸⁷

"The laws were created in a time when 80% of parents in Louisiana were married. Now... the landscape has changed, but the laws never changed to support the new landscape."

— *Region 4 Listening Session participant (Lafayette)*

In 1979, Louisiana replaced its historical preference for awarding primary custody of minor children to mothers in *Louisiana Civil Code Article 146* with gender neutral factors that weigh the best interest of the child when deciding custody.⁸⁸ *Louisiana Civil Code Article 134*, sets the current standard a judge must use to make custody decisions. This includes significant factors such as the potential for abuse and factors that go beyond safety, including the historical placement of the child and an evaluation of each parent's ability to provide care. While the law allows courts to award either parent custody based on 14 statutory factors related to the "best interest of the child," courts often still equate stability and continuity of care with the role of the mother, awarding fathers primary custody only when mothers were proven unfit.⁸⁹ While joint custody has become the "preferred" norm in contested custody cases, equal time remains a barrier and mothers are still more likely to be designated the domiciliary parent. According to reports from DCFS Access and Visitation program staff in their presentation to the Task Force, the mother is the custodial parent in approximately 93% of the cases they see.

While LDH reports that Louisiana has made substantial efforts to promote voluntary paternity acknowledgment at or shortly after birth over the past decade, many paternity cases still proceed through the courts, particularly when child support is sought or when parents have informal or unstable relationships. While paternity establishment is the critical first step in unlocking fathers' rights to custody and visitation, many fathers do not understand this process and lack legal representation

to establish paternity and the legally enforceable rights to custodial time or decision-making that follow.

Similarly, Louisiana's custody and visitation processes often require a father to file petitions with the court, respond to motions, attend hearings, and participate in hearing officer conferences, which can be very difficult for fathers without legal representation, according to fathers' and family law practitioners' reports to the Task Force. Over the past decade, they report that Louisiana courts have seen an uptick in self-representation in family law cases. Fathers, particularly low-income fathers, frequently appear *pro se*, resulting in difficulty presenting evidence, one-sided parenting plans, limited or supervised visitation, and uneven judgements.⁹⁰ While civil legal challenges are core determinants of whether fathers can be involved in their children's lives, Louisiana has historically lacked an accessible system to ensure that fathers receive the legal help they need before problems are exacerbated.⁹¹ This results in increasing numbers of fathers without a means to access custodial schedules when the other parent is uncooperative. These outcomes have historically contributed to long-term disengagement or lack of involvement, not because fathers lack interest but because structural barriers impede the parenting process. In this context, the state of fatherhood in Louisiana has been shaped less by paternal motivation and more by structural conditions, especially legal systems that determine whether and how fathers can maintain meaningful roles in their children's lives. Too often fathers end up with a custody judgement that limits the parenting time

and is difficult to change, due to Louisiana's Bergeron standard and fathers' lack of understanding of the legal process.⁹² Strengthening access to civil legal representation, particularly in parenting, custody, visitation, and child support cases, represents a critical opportunity to reshape fatherhood for the next decade: increasing parity, stability, and alignment with the best interests of Louisiana's children.

Child Support Enforcement and its impacts on father involvement

Across survey and listening session responses, Louisiana fathers also expressed frustration with child support systems that do not reflect shared custody, real income, or caregiving contributions. Among fathers who reported direct interaction with Child Support Enforcement in the survey, approximately 64% reported dissatisfaction, underscoring widespread concern that enforcement practices often undermine financial stability and consistent parental involvement. Over the past decade, the DCFS Child Support Enforcement system has undergone periodic federal guideline reviews and modernization efforts aimed at improving efficiency and collections. However, research shows that child support orders often do not reflect actual ability to pay, especially for low-income fathers, and can lead to accumulation of arrears, civil contempt, and often withdrawal from father-child relationships.⁹³ These consequences have shaped the lived reality of fatherhood in Louisiana and represent many fathers' negative perceptions of DCFS.

"I'm a United States Marine combat veteran and honor graduate of Parris Island. I've served my country under the hardest conditions imaginable – where accountability, discipline, and integrity meant everything, and failure to act could cost lives. But no battlefield I've faced compares to the one I've been fighting here at home – in Louisiana's family court system.

Before my divorce in 2021, being a father was the center of my entire life. I coached all three of my sons' sports teams – baseball, football, and basketball. I helped with homework at the kitchen table, packed lunches in the morning, and dropped them off and picked them up from school every single day I was home from offshore. I was the dad cheering loudest from the sidelines and the one they ran to when they were proud, or when they were hurting. That bond was my greatest purpose in life – and it all changed, not because of any failure as a father, but because of the weaponization of the family court system, where divorce became a tool to sever a father's bond rather than preserve a child's best interest. Overnight, everything I built with my boys

– the structure, the stability, the everyday moments – was stripped away.

As a father, I've learned that you can do everything right – follow every court order, show up on time, pay what's required – and still lose the most precious thing in your life: time with your children.

Just this week, as I prepared to speak before you, I received a message canceling my visit this weekend with my three young sons. No reason, no accountability. Just: "The boys are unavailable. It will be documented accordingly."

Unfortunately, that wasn't an isolated incident. Last year, I went ten months without being granted a single visit. Ten months. During that time, my company spent thousands of dollars to fly me in from offshore so I could attend one scheduled visit. I sat there waiting – excited, hopeful – only to be told the mother had "forgotten." When the visitation center kindly offered to fit a visit in later that day, she simply said, "No. We will not be coming today." And yes, she received no consequences.

This is the reality for too many fathers in Louisiana. The laws are written in such a way that family law judges hold massive personal discretion with almost zero oversight or accountability. They can interpret, reword, or reshape the facts of a case however they choose – and once it's signed, it becomes law for that family.

The data is clear: fathers are vital. Yet our laws and our culture continue to undervalue their importance, making it harder for them to remain active in their children's lives.

I know firsthand the pain and suffering of growing up without a father. I never knew mine until I was already an adult. That absence shaped my entire understanding of fatherhood, responsibility, and love. And

it's exactly why I fight so hard to be present for my sons – to give them what I never had: a loving, consistent father.

Today, even with court orders and full compliance, I face the same wall too many fathers in Louisiana face – a system of injustice that allows one parent's will to override truth, evidence, and a father's love....

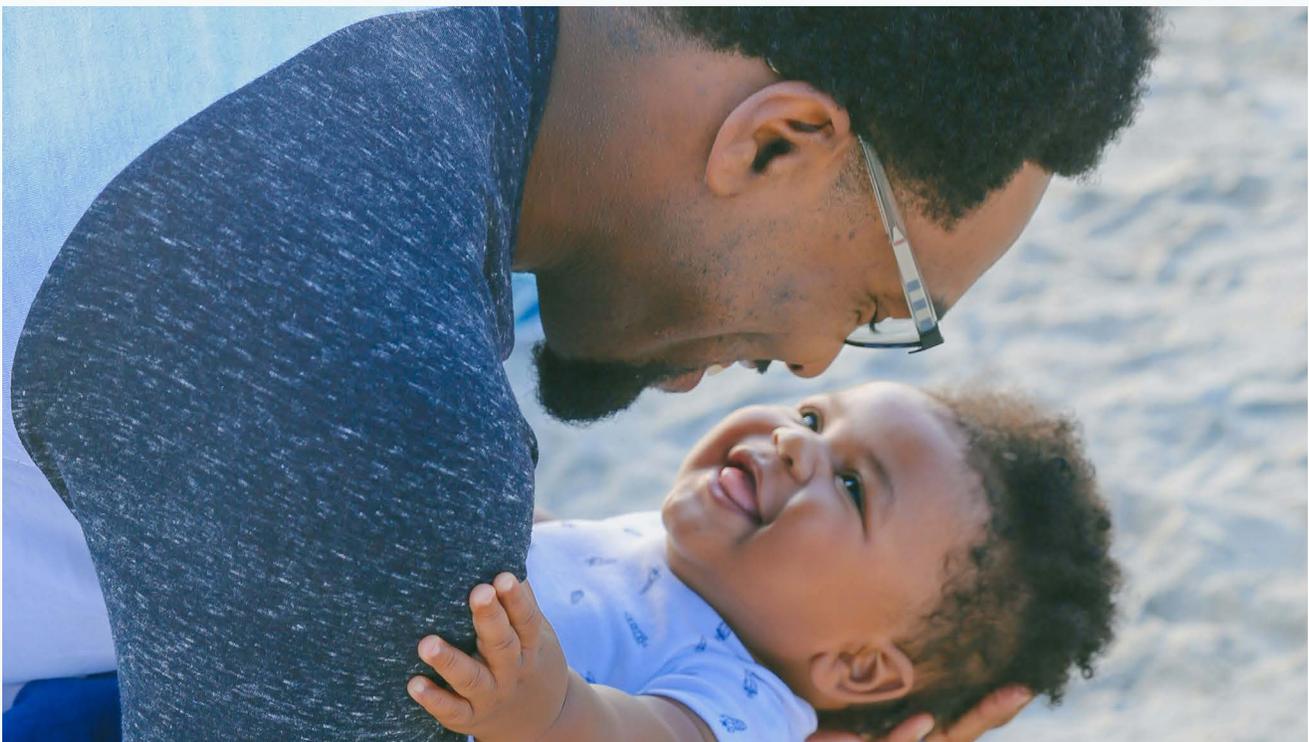
As Marines, we're taught never to abandon our post.

Fatherhood is the most sacred post there is – and I will never abandon mine."

— *David, Lafayette*

Recommendations

Collectively, the listening session data and survey findings paint a compelling portrait of fathers in Louisiana, highlighting the need for a more streamlined, father-inclusive approach to systems and programmatic policy design and implementation. Fathers are asking for more fair, clear, and transparent systems that recognize them as important caregivers, honor their dignity, and facilitate fathers' ability to engage meaningfully and consistently in their children's lives. In tandem with policy reform, efforts that more intentionally address barriers to engagement, along with investment in father-centered services, offer the opportunity to not only strengthen father engagement but also reduce conflict, improve family and child well-being, and produce benefits for families and communities statewide.



The Louisiana Task Force on Fatherhood Engagement makes the following recommendations to the Louisiana Legislature and executive branch of the state:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Establish a standing Commission on Fatherhood Engagement

Action required by the Louisiana Legislature

Louisiana has the opportunity to make fatherhood a priority throughout the state. A standing Louisiana Commission on Fatherhood Engagement can work across state government agencies to identify and advance opportunities for Louisiana to better support the engagement of fathers in the lives of their children. The work of the Task Force has only begun to address the opportunities and challenges related to fatherhood engagement in Louisiana. A standing Commission can help carry this work forward and advance implementation of these recommendations. Other states, including Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina, have developed standing commissions on fatherhood.⁹⁴ The [Ohio Commission on Fatherhood](#), founded in 1999, has regularly been looked to as a national model. The Louisiana Commission on Fatherhood Engagement should build on the work of this Task Force and be modeled on similar efforts in states like Ohio. It should have dedicated staffing and coordinate with other boards and commissions focused on mothers, children, and families. It can be charged with (1) recommending and supporting programming, policies, and resources focused on accountability, support, and advocacy for the

engagement of fathers in the lives of their children; (2) promoting promising practices in fatherhood engagement across Louisiana, including a statewide public awareness campaign about the importance of fathers; and (3) identifying, pursuing, and recommending funding to improve fatherhood engagement efforts in Louisiana. Its membership should include leaders of state agencies that engage fathers as well as family court judges, leaders of fatherhood focused non-profit, faith-based, and community organizations, and fathers themselves from regions across the state. The Commission can play an important role in supporting the implementation of the other recommendations outlined in this report.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Implement effective fatherhood programming across state agencies with a focus on supporting effective parenting and partnership between parents beginning during pregnancy.

Action required by individual state agencies and/or the Louisiana Legislature

Across the listening sessions and survey results, fathers articulated a clear call for systems that recognize them as equal caregivers and prioritize children's long-term stability. Louisiana fathers emphasized the importance of investing in father-centered programs that address economic stability, housing, transportation, mental health, and workforce development. 85% of Task Force survey respondents indicated an interest in participating in fatherhood programs, with particular interest in

mentoring (50% of respondents), mental health support (48%), opportunities for peer connection (47%), legal support (41%), and parenting classes (41%). Additional resources fathers indicated would be helpful included education, employment and training, financial literacy, medical and health care support, and housing assistance. This strong interest in participation, combined with widespread dissatisfaction with existing systems, highlights a clear opportunity to redesign policies and programs in partnership with fathers to strengthen family stability and child wellbeing. While many state agencies have already identified specific strategies and plans to support increased fatherhood engagement (see Individual State Agency Plans and Recommendations), the Task Force has also identified several opportunities to lay a strong foundation and shift organizational culture to increase fatherhood involvement across state agencies. These include:

A. Requiring annual submission of fatherhood engagement plans and reports for each state agency overseeing a body of work that requires the regular engagement of families and/or fathers. Each state agency should be expected to implement and report on its plans to establish a strong culture of fatherhood engagement, as detailed for the Louisiana Task Force on Fatherhood Engagement during presentations in the fall of 2025 and included in the Individual State Agency Plans and Recommendations section of this report. This should apply to all agencies represented on the Louisiana Children’s Cabinet and can be managed and supported by the Louisiana Commission on Fatherhood Engagement, once authorized.

B. Continuing to implement and expand promising programs currently supported by the State of Louisiana that have robust fatherhood engagement and align with what Louisiana fathers say they want and need, including [Head Start](#), [Healthy Start](#), [Malachi Dads](#), [Fathers On A Mission](#), and others.

C. Requiring annual training on understanding adverse childhood experiences and child trauma, effective parenting and parent partnerships, the importance of fatherhood engagement, shared parenting research, effective fatherhood engagement practices, legal requirements related to paternal rights, and minimizing biases against fathers for staff of child and family-serving agencies. This training should be required of – and appropriately incentivized for – pediatricians; perinatal and men’s health providers; child welfare and social service providers; public safety professionals; courts and family law providers; and others who regularly engage with parents and/or their children. These can draw on numerous available resources and templates in Louisiana and nationally, as detailed in the Appendix below, and can include the use of father-friendly language and images and the development and use of father and family-specific Policy Impact Assessments to assess the potential impacts of proposed changes in policy, investment, or programs on fathers and families. This can follow the growing practice of policy impact assessments used worldwide and incorporate a specific focus on fathers.⁹⁵

D. Encouraging state agencies to partner with fatherhood engagement programs and groups

to advance trusted and knowledgeable implementation of best practices in fatherhood engagement throughout their work. These partnerships can allow state agencies to access additional expertise, extend the reach of critical state resources and services, and provide space to community-based fatherhood engagement programs. In addition, where possible, state agencies should integrate fatherhood engagement expectations and requirements into existing family and child-focused programs that are funded by the state across the child welfare, criminal justice, education, health, and workforce systems. For example, the Department of Public Safety and Corrections can incorporate family reunification more prominently into reentry planning; the Department of Education can establish expectations for fatherhood engagement across state-funded child care programs; and the Department of Health can increase awareness of the putative father registry and promote best practices for fatherhood engagement in perinatal and early childhood health.

E. Intentionally including multiple fathers from different backgrounds in parent engagement programs, advisory boards, commissions, and leadership roles

focused on fatherhood and family engagement to ensure the perspectives and experiences of fathers inform the agencies' family and child-focused communications, information, policies, programs, and resources.

Boards and commissions where dedicated fatherhood representation is warranted include the Advisory Council on Student Behavior and Discipline, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) Accountability Council, BESE Early Childhood Education Advisory Council, Child Death Review Panel, Children's Cabinet Advisory Board, Children's Trust Fund Board, Commission on Perinatal Care and Prevention of Infant Mortality, Council on the Children of Incarcerated Parents and Caregivers, Early Childhood Care and Education Commission, Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Board, Governor's Advisory Board of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Louisiana Literacy Advisory Commission, Louisiana Perinatal Quality Collaborative, Louisiana Workforce Commission, Reentry Advisory Council, and Special Education Advisory Council, among others.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Improve data collection and usage on fathers and fatherhood engagement across government agencies.

Action required by individual state agencies and/or the Louisiana Legislature

The information Louisiana currently gathers and analyzes on fathers is extremely limited. This makes it very difficult to address fatherhood engagement in ways that are strategic and track their impacts. Every government agency that regularly engages with fathers and/or their children should regularly capture and report data on fathers and fatherhood



engagement that feeds into a standard statewide family and household data and insight system with consistent definitions and collection across agencies. Key areas include:

- A. **Establishing a statewide family and household data and insights system** that standardizes definitions and data collection across family and households, securely integrates data across agencies, and provides accurate data to inform coordinated, evidence-driven policy and better outcomes for children and families.
- B. **Regularly tracking and aggregating cases and case outcomes in child custody and child support proceedings** across Louisiana's family

courts with leadership from the Louisiana Supreme Court. Key metrics to track include parenting-time percentages by parents gender, frequency of – and reasons for – deviations from equal shared physical custody; and child safety-related findings.

- C. **Capturing *fathers'* contact information on all paperwork and using it for regular communication and engagement:** The Louisiana Departments of Education, Health, and Children & Family Services and the local and regional service providers they engage should request information on the father prominently on all enrollment paperwork related to health

(including perinatally), education, and child welfare services that may only be filled out by one parent. If a parent's information is left blank, an explanation should be requested with additional documentation when needed without overburdening institutions or children without established paternity. Service providers should then be required to use this information to ensure regular communication with all parents/guardians about the child and factors impacting their education, health, and well-being, including telehealth options for fathers to virtually accompany the mother or other caregiver to important education and medical appointments.

- D. Capturing *children's* data on all father-focused paperwork and using it to support fatherhood involvement:** Request information on children for all enrollment paperwork for fathers with Louisiana Public Safety & Corrections and Louisiana Works, and use this information to promote fatherhood involvement with their children. Examples of how this information may be used include but are not limited to considering factors related to their children in workforce training and placement, planning activities specifically for fathers and children together (e.g., father-daughter dance), etc.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Dedicate funding in the annual state budget specifically for community-based programs to support fatherhood engagement as a downpayment on family stability.

Action required by individual state agencies and/or the Louisiana Legislature

Formal support structures for Louisiana's fathers are currently extremely limited. Fathers need training in parenting, co-parenting, and conflict resolution. They need support in accessing counseling, peer support networks, legal assistance, housing assistance, and workforce training. They need help identifying and addressing mental health challenges, legal barriers, and accessing economic opportunities that allow them to provide financially and be present physically and emotionally for their children. Community-based organizations are often best positioned to provide this kind of support. A \$2.5 million annual allocation in the state budget to launch the Louisiana Commission on Fatherhood and make grants to community-based organizations across the state's nine public health regions could help establish these supports. This would provide an important down payment on family stability that will produce significant long-term savings to the state from the cost of social programs, child support collection, and other efforts to make up for absent fathers. A national study on the return on investment of responsible fatherhood programming found that each father who successfully completes a responsible fatherhood program generates \$177,000 in additional social benefits over their lifetime in additional earnings, taxes paid, child support payments, and savings on social programs. The study goes on to calculate an additional \$85,000 per child in benefits for children who have involved fathers and access to quality early care and education.⁹⁶

In 2025, the Ohio State Legislature allocated \$20 million for Responsible Fatherhood programs to be administered by the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood.⁹⁷ In state fiscal year 2025, Ohio saw a 41.6% increase in child support payments among fathers who completed these programs.⁹⁸ Since 2021, the Florida Legislature has allocated over \$95 million as part of Florida's Responsible Fatherhood Initiative, Father First, to support services for fathers, create a public awareness campaign related to responsible fatherhood, and provide evidence-based parenting education to meet the individual needs of the fathers. A portion of that funding supports grant programs for evidence-based educational programming on topics such as parent coaching, co-parenting collaboration, newborn and infant care education, and parenting skills training; and

grant programs to address the comprehensive needs of fathers in finding employment, managing child support obligations, understanding child development, and enhancing parenting skills.⁹⁹

RECOMMENDATION 5: Improve support for fathers during the perinatal period.

Action required by the Louisiana Legislature, Louisiana Department of Health, and individual health care providers

The perinatal and early childhood period when parents are learning to parent sets the tone for parental behavior throughout a child's life. It also offers a unique opportunity to lay a foundation for strong parenting partnerships (regardless of whether the parents are married or not) and the involvement



of fathers in the lives of their children. Louisiana can better support the involvement of fathers from the beginning by:

- A. Promoting more widespread availability of video conferencing and other telehealth options** for early childhood and prenatal visits to accommodate participation of patients and their support system, including expectant fathers who may not be able to be physically present.
- B. Ensuring a child’s medical records can be accessed by both parents** from birth.
- C. Requiring training for staff in Labor and Delivery, Maternity Wards, and NICUs** on how to create a more welcoming environment and support for both parents, which may include having accommodations for both parents to comfortably be present, sharing pertinent information with both parents, and making resources and literature available for both parents.
- D. Promoting paternity declarations** to make it easier for fathers to establish paternity by requiring private insurance and Medicaid coverage for paternity tests, requiring hospitals to post information about the paternity declaration process and the [Putative Father Registry](#) on birthing and postpartum units, and requiring the Louisiana Department of Health to develop materials for their use. The fact that 15% of birth certificates did not include paternal information or acknowledgment of paternity represents a critical missed opportunity for

Louisiana to establish a critical line of emotional and financial support for children from day one.

- E. Piloting postpartum depression screening initiatives for fathers alongside mothers.** Given the maternal mental health crisis and alarming rates at which fathers reported mental health challenges, recent initiatives to advance universal screening of mothers for postpartum depression should be expanded to include fathers. This can begin with policies encouraging fathers to attend postpartum appointments, pediatricians to promote these screenings (building on the state’s use of the Caregiver Perinatal Depression Screening in pediatric practices through the Louisiana Perinatal Quality Collaborative), and can build on existing nurse home-visiting programs, Healthy Start programs, and the Collaborative Care Model recommended by the Louisiana Perinatal Health Task Force.¹⁰⁰
- F. Extending paid family medical leave** to more Louisiana fathers following the birth or adoption of a child. Per Section 21 of Governor Landry’s 2024 [Executive Order JML 24-122](#), Louisiana offers six weeks of paid parental leave to all full-time unclassified state employees – both mothers and fathers. Other southern states, including Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee have extended paid leave for public school teachers who are fathers.¹⁰¹ [Louisiana Senate Study Request 3](#) (2024) called for Louisiana to explore a similar measure, which would provide valuable support for fathers to bond with their new child.

G. Adopting “Dad Doula” programming in Louisiana and ensuring private insurance and Medicaid coverage for it to train fathers as doulas who specifically support fathers through the birthing process and early stages of becoming a parent. To do this, the Louisiana Department of Health should be charged with the creation or adoption of a “Dad Doula” training curriculum that can be offered by Louisiana doula training programs and establish requirements for “Dad Doulas” to be registered by the Louisiana Doula Registry Board and eligible for insurance coverage. Similar programs like [Dad Doula](#) and [Doulas4Dads](#) are already offered in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington, DC. Research on these programs has shown promising results in decreasing stress and depressive symptoms among fathers and increasing their mindfulness as a foundation for effective parenting and partnering with the other parent.¹⁰²

H. Encouraging perinatal health care providers to offer parenting and partnership in parenting classes to expecting parents that go beyond the birthing process to lay the foundation for effective communication, conflict resolution, and effective parenting partnerships, regardless of whether they are married or not.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Establish housing assistance and shelter priorities specifically for fathers with minor children.

Action required by Louisiana Housing Corporation, individual shelter and homeless service providers, local continuums of care, and/or the Louisiana Legislature

Nearly one in four Louisiana fathers surveyed indicated that housing assistance would be a most helpful resource to support them as fathers. Yet, in Louisiana, most shelters and housing assistance programs for families focus on mothers with children. Historically, federal housing assistance programs have discouraged fathers from being named on the lease or recognized as a part of the household for fear of making families ineligible for assistance. Louisiana can establish policies that expand the definition of family housing to include fathers with minor children, including non-custodial and child support-involved fathers – without sacrificing access, support, or safety for vulnerable mothers – and connecting them to additional services like job placement, child care, etc.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Improve policies and practices to ensure fair and equal opportunities for fathers in child custody, visitation, and family court proceedings.

Action required by the Louisiana Supreme Court, Louisiana State Law Institute, and the Louisiana Legislature

As noted above, some of the greatest structural barriers fathers face to greater involvement in the lives of their children are related to Louisiana law and the operation of its family courts. Louisiana fathers who have engaged with DCFS and family courts have consistently and urgently expressed a need for change to ensure clear custody expectations, predictable parenting time, fewer court appearances, and reduced legal costs by:

A. Codifying a stronger presumption of equal shared physical custody in law as the default in Louisiana

child custody cases before weighing Article 134 factors related to the “best interest of the child.” While Louisiana law has moved toward a presumption of equal custody, in practice, many courts often still equate stability and continuity of care with the role of the mother.¹⁰³ Addressing this bias requires the Louisiana Legislature to modernize Louisiana custody law by creating a structured, evidence-based presumption of equal shared physical custody as in the best interest of the child, while preserving judicial discretion and prioritizing child safety. Revisions should ensure a rebuttable presumption of equal shared physical custody and parenting time in which the presumption that equal shared physical custody is in the best interest of the child must be rebutted by a preponderance of evidence demonstrating that equal shared physical custody would present a specific and identifiable risk to the child’s safety or significantly impair the child’s emotional or developmental well-being. Any deviation from the presumption of equal shared physical custody shall be supported by written findings of fact identifying the evidence relied upon.

B. Revising Louisiana’s Civil Code to reduce judicial ambiguity and address inconsistencies in how judges weigh Article 134 factors by adopting provisions from the [National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges’ Model Code on Domestic and Family Violence](#).¹⁰⁴ This Model Code offers detailed definitions and procedural safeguards that provide necessary guidance for judicial decision-making. Adopting the Model Code could reduce subjective interpretation

by requiring judges to account for specific behaviors and contexts, ensuring that rulings are based on evidence rather than judicial inclination. Nearly all states now consider domestic violence in custody cases, with over half, including Louisiana, establishing child custody presumptions against abusers. Expanding the adoption of the Model Code’s structural guidance would further standardize how these complex issues are weighed. By reducing judicial ambiguity through the adoption of Model Code frameworks, the state can ensure that custody rulings are consistent, equitable, and conducive to maximizing the involvement of fathers without risking the safety of children or mothers.

C. Clarifying and codifying the *Bergeron* standard to allow fathers to more easily demonstrate a change in circumstances that would allow a change in child custody arrangements. For fathers seeking to increase their parenting time, the *Bergeron* standard establishes a high burden of proof to modify existing custody orders. Currently, this standard exists only in case law, making it difficult to apply consistently. The Louisiana State Law Institute is drafting a codification of this standard into a new *Louisiana Civil Code Article 138*, which follows through on the Louisiana Legislature’s passage of [HR 242](#) in 2022. The proposed statute creates a clear distinction between Consent Decrees (modifiable upon a material change in circumstances) and Considered Decrees (modifiable only by meeting the higher *Bergeron* burden of proof). This clarity ensures

fathers understand exactly what is required to petition for increased time. It also should include a provision that limits the heightened *Bergeron* burden to a *three-year* period, in which a considered decree would become modifiable after three years under the lesser standard of a “material change in circumstances.” This change prevents fathers from being permanently “locked out” of their children’s lives due to a single ruling made years prior, allowing the court to acknowledge a father’s personal growth and changed circumstances over time.

D. Exploring federally allowable uses of Title IV-D funds related to paternity and child support establishment, along with non-IV-D funding sources, to support fathers’ engagement.¹⁰⁵

Addressing legal issues early prevents escalation and supports healthy family dynamics.¹⁰⁶ Title IV-D of the Social Security Act provides federal funding (66% matching funds) to states to operate child support programs. IV-D funds may be used – and increasingly are being encouraged by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) – to support holistic, family-centered services that promote parental engagement, cooperative parenting, and child well-being, and discourage punitive and enforcement-only approaches.¹⁰⁷ IV-D allowable activities for eligible parents include mediation around child support, coaching or navigation support under procedural justice models, outreach and referrals to legal aid, and self-help legal assistance at local child support offices.¹⁰⁸ Neighboring southern states such as Texas and Georgia have used IV-D funding

to expand access to legal resources that improve father involvement, reduce conflict, and enhance stability for children.

These efforts may have the potential to increase meaningful access to predictable and consistent parenting time for fathers – especially unmarried and low-income fathers – through enforceable and binding custody judgments. They can also improve compliance with child support, as fathers are significantly more likely to pay formal child support when they have meaningful visitation, the support order reflects actual income, and relationships with the custodial parent are cooperative or accountable. Ultimately, this improves child outcomes.

E. Establishing dedicated staffing at the Louisiana Supreme Court to advance consistent and evidence-based father engagement in family courts across Louisiana.

Louisiana does not operate a uniform family court system. Instead, responsibility for family law matters is divided among the state’s general jurisdiction district courts, one dedicated family court, and four specialized juvenile courts. Overall, the state maintains a patchwork system that varies significantly by parish and by local practice. As a result, fathers report facing judges they consider biased and see significantly different outcomes for similar cases in different jurisdictions. As the state’s leading entity responsible for issuing guidance to district courts, the Louisiana Supreme Court is well-positioned to promote more consistent practices regarding fathers and family court proceedings across the state. Along

with the recommendations above focused on strengthening the Civil Code and state statutes to guide the judiciary, the Supreme Court can provide training and encourage family courts to partner with local responsible fatherhood programs and use evidence-based alternatives like mediation, hearing officers, and other measures for less complex child support, custody, and visitation proceedings.

F. Requiring family court judges to provide litigants without representation information about proceedings and the impacts of decisions or rulings on their potential future claims related to their children. *Boykin v. Alabama*, 395 U.S. 238 (1969) established that guilty pleas in criminal cases must be made voluntarily and intelligently. It emphasized that defendants must be informed of their constitutional rights and must knowingly waive those rights for a plea

to be valid. The ruling highlighted that courts must provide clear evidence that a defendant's guilty plea was entered into freely and with full understanding, as a lack of such evidence can lead to a reversal of the conviction. As a result, criminal court defendants are notified of the potential implications of their guilty plea and often required to sign a number of statements confirming their understanding. No similar measure exists in family law, even though many fathers end up with a protection order against them or a *Bergeron* standard that makes it very difficult for them to modify child custody arrangements. As a result, too many fathers end up with limited access to their children simply due to their lack of legal representation and understanding of the legal consequences of the proceedings.



Potential Funding Sources to Grow Fatherhood Engagement in Louisiana

While the number of funding sources specifically dedicated for fatherhood engagement are limited, numerous funding sources – both philanthropic and governmental – include funding to support fatherhood engagement as part of broader strategies related to strengthening families, advancing individual success, and supporting child well-being. Key potential funding sources to support implementation of the recommendations outlined above and fatherhood engagement efforts across Louisiana, more broadly, are outlined below.

Federal Funding

A review of efforts to support fatherhood engagement across states that was conducted in 2019 found that most financial support of fatherhood programs comes from the federal government.¹⁰⁹ Even with recent cuts to federal funding programs, this remains true today. Potential federal funding sources are organized below into formula funds (federal funding allocated to each state according to a formula) and competitive grants (funding that is awarded to states or non-profits based on the activities they propose and may not be awarded to all states). Note that this is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all funding sources for father engagement and support.

Formula Funding

Every Student Succeeds Act Title I

Title I Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act provides federal funding to state and local education agencies to help schools provide a high-quality education for students from low-income families. By law, local education agencies (LEAs) must reserve a portion of their Title I Part A funds for family engagement, distribute the majority of this funding to schools, engage families in creating and evaluating a family engagement policy and gather their input into how funds will be used. As detailed further in the [Louisiana Department of Education's report to the Task Force](#), schools must develop a family-school compact focused on shared responsibilities for academic achievement. Both LEAs and schools receiving this funding must also engage in a number of activities to build the capacity of families and educators to strengthen family-school partnerships

and assist families in supporting their children's education.¹¹⁰

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) TANF is a \$16.5 billion block grant program created in 1996. One of the congressional findings of the law that enacted the TANF program stated, "Promotion of responsible fatherhood...is integral to successful child rearing and the well-being of children." More than half of all states use some TANF or their state maintenance of effort (MOE) funds for responsible fatherhood activities.¹¹¹ Research, however, indicates that national spending in this area remains below 0.5% of total TANF and MOE spending.¹¹² Other states have used unspent TANF funds to support responsible fatherhood programming, consistent with TANF's purposes 2) To end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage; 3) To prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and 4) To encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Title IV-D of the Social Security Act / Block Grant

Title IV-D of the Social Security Act provides federal funding (66% matching funds) to states to operate child support programs. In Louisiana, when combined with the 33% MOE funding from the state, this totals nearly \$60 million annually for Louisiana DCFS' Office of Child Support. Child support incentive payments are performance-based, tied to collections and cost-effectiveness. As noted in the Recommendations section above, the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement is increasingly encouraging states to use IV-D funds to support holistic, family-centered

services that promote parental engagement, cooperative parenting, and child well-being.

The Access and Visitation (AV) Grant Program

The AV Grant Program may be the oldest example of federal support for the noneconomic role of fathers that is currently in operation. Begun in 1997 and administered by the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), the AV grant program involves annual awards to states ranging from \$100,000 to \$1 million annually. Awards to states are based on a formula that considers the ratio of children in single-parent families relative to two-parent families. This grant program seeks to increase contact between nonresident parents and their children. Funds are often used for programs such as counseling, mediation, supervised visitation, parent education, and the development of parenting plans that specify how the child's time will be divided between parents who do not reside with one another. In Louisiana, the Department of Children and Family Services have used these funds to support innovative access and visitation programs for parents with open child support cases in four eligible parishes.

Court Improvement Program (CIP) Grants

Section 438 of Title IV-B, subpart 2 of the Social Security Act sets aside federal funding for the CIP with approximately \$484,000 in annual federal funding, which is already allocated to improvements in child welfare.¹¹³ This is a mandatory formula grant available to the highest court of appeal in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The CIP was designed to promote the continuous quality improvement

of court processes and legal representation in child welfare proceedings through ongoing data analysis, assessment, interventions and training; and enhance and expand collaboration between the judicial branch of state government, the title IV-E/IV-B agency, and tribes to improve child welfare outcomes. In FY2024, approximately \$31 million was budgeted nationally for this program. In Louisiana, the Louisiana Supreme Court coordinates with the [Pelican Center for Children and Families](#) to administer the CIP with approximately \$484,000 in annual federal funding.¹¹³

Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) Grants

CBCAP programs were established by Title II of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act Amendments of 1996, which have since undergone multiple reauthorizations. The CBCAP program:

- Supports community-based efforts to develop, operate, expand, enhance, and coordinate initiatives, programs, and activities to prevent child abuse and neglect and to support the coordination of resources and activities to better strengthen and support families to reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect; and
- Fosters understanding, appreciation and knowledge of diverse populations in order to effectively prevent and treat child abuse and neglect.

Federal CBCAP funds are provided to states to blend with other funds and make available to community agencies for child abuse and neglect prevention

activities and family support programs. These funds can be used specifically for fatherhood programs, but are not currently designated for this in Louisiana. In Louisiana, the program is administered through the Louisiana Children’s Trust Fund.

Title V Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant

First created by the Social Security Act of 1935, Health Resources and Service Administration (HRSA) provides funding to states to support programs and services for women, children, adolescents, including children and youth with special healthcare needs (CYSHCN), and their families through the Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant. In Louisiana, the program is administered by the LDH Office of Public Health Bureau of Family Health (BFH) and uses the 10 Essential Public Health Services framework for understanding and strengthening the state’s maternal and child health systems of care. Essential public health services supported by the program include public health surveillance, epidemiological investigation, public health education, clinical and community-based system strengthening, regional and state coordination, and policy development. While minimal Title V funding is currently specifically dedicated for fathers and fatherhood engagement, Louisiana’s current [2026-2030 state action plan](#) for Title V funding identifies numerous priorities that require robust fatherhood engagement.

Medicaid

Medicaid is an important source of funding for numerous health and maternal health services for low-income and qualifying Louisiana fathers. Last fiscal year, Louisiana received over \$16 billion in

federal funding through the Medicaid program.¹¹⁴ While Medicaid operates based on an individual’s need for service, it can provide important care for the mental and physical health of fathers through eligible providers.¹¹⁵

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Wagner-Peyser Act Funds

Since its passage by Congress in 2014, WIOA has sought to strengthen and improve our nation’s public workforce system and help get Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment, into high-quality jobs and careers and help employers hire and retain skilled workers. It provides nearly \$3 billion in annual funding through the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration (ETA) to states for workforce development and training with specific populations, including youth, adults, and dislocated workers. Approximately \$45 million is allocated annually to Louisiana.¹¹⁶ While none of the funding is specifically allocated for fathers, many fathers are served, as this is the primary federal funding stream to support workforce development in the United States. As noted in the November 2025 report to the Task Force from Louisiana Works, federal WIOA funds support 109 single Louisiana fathers, 97 of whom are accessing workforce training and 78 of whom are accessing multiple services, including job placement, career counseling, training, and support services.

The [Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933](#) established a nationwide system of public employment offices, known as the Employment Service. The Employment

Service seeks to improve the functioning of the nation's labor markets by bringing together individuals seeking employment with employers seeking workers. The Wagner-Peyser Act was amended in 1998 and 2014 to make the Employment Service part of the one-stop delivery system under WIOA. It requires and helps fund collocation of the Employment Service offices into the nearly 2,500 American Job Centers nationwide, and aligns performance accountability indicators with other federal workforce programs.¹¹⁷ As noted in the November 2025 report to the Task Force from Louisiana Works, these funds support 372 single Louisiana fathers enrolled in workforce services, 108 of whom received individual career services and 59 of whom completed training.

Competitive Grants

For many years, two federal programs have placed a significant focus on father engagement during the perinatal and early childhood period. These are Head Start (including Early Head Start) and Healthy Start. Both are awarded directly from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to local grantees, which can be non-profit organizations or local governments.

Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start are federal programs administered by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Head Start and Early Head Start programs serve children from birth to age 5 and pregnant women in urban and rural areas in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico,

and the U.S. territories. Since 1965, Head Start has served more than 30 million children. In 2024, Head Start served over 1 million children. According to 2024 Head Start Program Information Report data, Head Start currently provides \$214 million in funding through 82 local grants to serve 18,524 children in Louisiana, 14,300 through Head Start and 3,995 through Early Head Start. Grant recipients include local education agencies, community action agencies, non-profit organizations, and local governments. Each Head Start grant includes training and technical assistance funding that can support fatherhood specific programming. Since 1994, Head Start has included a specific focus on integrating father and male caregiver engagement into the program, so grantees partner with fathers and male caregivers to promote positive outcomes for their children, families, and themselves; help them develop their skills and interests and achieve goals for themselves and their families; and support them as advocates, lifelong educators, and first teachers of their children. While the way each local Head Start program operates may differ, Head Start offers a model for effective father engagement in the critical perinatal and early childhood years.

Healthy Start

Healthy Start was created in 1991 to invest in communities to improve health outcomes before, during, and after pregnancy. It is administered by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the federal HHS HRSA. Local Healthy Start projects tailor services to the needs of their communities to help reduce differences in rates of infant death and maternal health outcomes. Each grant is required to include

a fatherhood coordinator who is responsible for ensuring the robust engagement of fathers in the program through tailored strategies designed to meet their needs.¹¹⁸ Funding goes to communities experiencing high rates of adverse outcomes, including: infant mortality rates that are at least 150% the U.S. national average or high rates of preterm birth, low birth weight, and maternal illness. As of 2024, there are 115 Healthy Start projects providing services in 37 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. There are currently five active Healthy Start grants totalling approximately \$5 million in Louisiana.¹¹⁹

Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) Grants

Since 2006, the federal ACF Office of Family Assistance (OFA) has administered Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) program grants to foster economically secure households and communities for the well-being and long-term success of children and families. In addition to grants, OFA also funds The [National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse](#), which serves as a free resource for responsible fatherhood information to promote and encourage the appropriate involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. The HMRF grant programs are specifically designed to help interested adults and youth build stronger relationships, marriages, father-child engagement, and families. HMRF grantees provide services that combine father-child involvement skills development to address participation barriers and the economic stability needs of their participants with healthy relationship education (romantic and interpersonal) to improve

father engagement and strengthen co-parenting and overall child and family well-being. There are currently 109 grant awards to various organizations in 38 states to provide activities to promote healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood promotion activities across three grant programs:

- Family, Opportunity, Resilience, Grit, Engagement — Fatherhood (FORGE Fatherhood)
- Helping Every Area of Relationships Thrive - Adults (HEART)
- Relationships, Education, Advancement, and Development for Youth for Life (READY4Life)

Louisiana currently has two active HMRF grants totalling \$1.5 million over five years through the Start Corporation (a HEART grant) and Family Road of Greater Baton Rouge (a READY4Life grant).¹²⁰

U.S. Department of Education Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFEC)

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFEC) program provides financial support to organizations that provide technical assistance and training to state and local educational agencies in the implementation and enhancement of systemic and effective family engagement policies, programs, and activities.¹²¹ Competitive grants are designed to establish statewide family engagement centers that carry out parent education and family engagement in education programs, and provide comprehensive training and technical assistance to schools, education agencies, and organizations that support

family-school partnerships and other such programs. The Center for Literacy and Learning was the most recent recipient of this grant for work in Louisiana.

State Funding

Due to a lack of available data, it is difficult to determine exactly how much funding the State of Louisiana currently invests in fathers and fatherhood engagement.

Philanthropic Funding

While philanthropic dollars can be used to fund innovation, demonstrations, evaluation and systems-change initiatives, they are typically not able to sustain fatherhood engagement programs

and resources long-term. National foundations that have been active in Louisiana in efforts like these include the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, the Kresge Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and others. In addition, many foundations nationally and located within Louisiana fund programs designed to improve child well-being, educational success, and family economic stability, which may or could include fatherhood engagement components. While these are too many to list for purposes of this report, many of the existing non-profit sector efforts to engage fathers in Louisiana receive funding from these philanthropic endeavors.





Individual State Agency Plans

These plans were provided to the Task Force by state agencies during its meetings, from October through December 2025. They offer a starting point for fatherhood engagement efforts across these agencies. As noted in the Barriers to Greater Fatherhood Engagement and Recommendations sections of this report, there are numerous cross-cutting challenges, themes, and implementation supports needed across agency plans.

Louisiana Children's Cabinet

SCR 9 Fatherhood Engagement Task Force Report

Prepared by:

Jolie V. Williamson, M.S.

Director of Children's Programs

Executive Director, Louisiana Children's Cabinet

Date: October 17, 2025

I. Overview of the Children's Cabinet

The **Louisiana Children's Cabinet** serves as the state's governing body responsible for coordinating funding, services, and policy related to children and their families across all state agencies. It consists of cabinet secretaries and key representatives from the Departments of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Health (LDH), Education (LDOE), Economic Development, Workforce Commission, Public Safety and Corrections (Youth Services), and others. The Cabinet is chaired by the Governor's appointed Executive Director.

Mission:

To achieve the most effective and efficient use of monetary, human, and organizational resources to lift children and families out of poverty through cross-agency collaboration and systemic alignment.

The Cabinet oversees and collaborates with the **Children's Cabinet Advisory Board (CCAB)**, which operates through six subcommittees addressing Early Learning, Literacy & K-12 Education, Behavioral Health, Family Stability, Vulnerable Youth, and Early Childhood Experiences. Additionally, the Cabinet provides oversight for the **Council on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren** and the Council on **Children of Incarcerated Parents and Caregivers (CIP Council)**.

II. Current and Past Work Related to Father Engagement

While the Children's Cabinet coordinates multiple initiatives that strengthen families, its structure and

mission focus primarily on **cross-agency coordination and oversight** rather than **direct service delivery**.

As such, the Cabinet **does not collect or maintain individual-level data** on program participation, including metrics specific to fathers or other caregiver categories.

Justification for Absence of Direct Data

The Children's Cabinet serves as a **strategic coordinating body**, not a programmatic agency. Its role is to:

- Align policy and budget priorities across departments.
- Facilitate collaboration among agencies serving children and families.
- Provide recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.
- Support and oversee councils and subcommittees that focus on system-level improvements.

Because the Cabinet **does not administer programs or services directly**, it does not maintain case-level or participant data such as "number of fathers served" or "father participation rates." These data are held by **implementing agencies** (e.g., DCFS, LDH, LDOE, OJJ) that provide direct service delivery.

However, the Cabinet ensures that agency programs under its coordination include **family engagement and inclusion strategies**, which inherently encompass fathers.

III. Programs and Services Supporting Fathers

Cross-Agency Initiatives

- **Louisiana Youth for Excellence (LYFE):** Provides relationship and character education for youth ages 10–19, with opportunities for parent and caregiver participation, including fathers.
- **Louisiana Children's Trust Fund (LCTF):** Funds child abuse and neglect prevention programs, some of which engage fathers through parent training, mentoring, and family support services.
- **Council on Children of Incarcerated Parents and Caregivers:** Supports family stability by promoting technology access and virtual visitation for incarcerated parents, including fathers.

These initiatives illustrate the Cabinet's **indirect role in supporting father engagement** through programmatic partners and council-led initiatives rather than through stand-alone fatherhood programs.

IV. Policies and Resource Allocation

The Cabinet supports policies that:

- Promote **family stability and caregiver inclusion** across state systems.
- Encourage agencies to **embed father engagement goals** into program standards and funding criteria.
- Emphasize **cross-agency collaboration** to reduce duplication and address service gaps for families.

While the Cabinet does not have a **dedicated funding line** for fatherhood programs, it prioritizes coordination among agencies that do, and advocates for future **fatherhood-specific appropriations** under statewide family stability and prevention efforts.

V. Partnerships and Representation

The Children's Cabinet and its Advisory Board maintain partnerships with:

- State agencies (DCFS, LDH, LDOE, OJJ, LWC)
- Judiciary bodies (LASC, BESE)
- Nonprofits, universities, and advocacy groups

Fathers are represented through advisory participation, community engagement events, and inclusion in awareness campaigns that highlight **fathers as active caregivers**.

However, the Cabinet acknowledges a need for **consistent and measurable representation** of fathers in decision-making and advisory roles.

VI. Barriers and Challenges

1. **Structural Limitation:** The Cabinet's coordinating role limits its access to direct service data and program evaluation metrics on fathers.
2. **Data Fragmentation:** Father-specific data is collected inconsistently across agencies.
3. **Funding Gaps:** Lack of dedicated funding for fatherhood programs.
4. **Cultural Stigma:** Societal norms sometimes discourage fathers from seeking family support services.

5. **Systemic Barriers:** Transportation, incarceration, and poverty continue to limit father participation.

VII. Opportunities and Future Work

The Cabinet is committed to advancing statewide fatherhood engagement as part of Louisiana's broader **Family Stability Framework**. Planned strategies include:

1. Data and Evaluation:

- Advocate for a **cross-agency father engagement data system**.
- Encourage agencies to disaggregate family engagement metrics by caregiver type.

2. Funding and Pilot Programs:

- Support 2–3 **pilot fatherhood engagement programs** through coordinated state and community partnerships.
- Identify opportunities for **federal or philanthropic funding** to establish dedicated fatherhood initiatives.

3. Representation and Messaging:

- Recruit fathers for **advisory and subcommittee roles**.
- Champion statewide **positive fatherhood narrative campaigns**.

4. Policy Development:

- Collaborate with agencies to embed father inclusion into policies for child welfare, education, and health.

VIII. Conclusion

Although the Louisiana Children's Cabinet does not directly collect or report fatherhood-specific data due to its structural role as a **policy and coordination body**, it remains a **key statewide leader** in advancing systems-level collaboration that supports fathers and families. Through its councils, advisory board, and interagency partnerships, the Cabinet fosters the alignment, visibility, and sustainability necessary to make **father engagement a core element of Louisiana's family stability efforts**.

Louisiana Department of Children & Family Services

DCFS Fatherhood Engagement Report: Commitments, Challenges & Opportunities



September 2025

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	What the Data Tells Us
	Focused on Better Outcomes for Children & Families
	We Invest In What's Important to Us
	Challenges & Opportunities

DCFS Overview



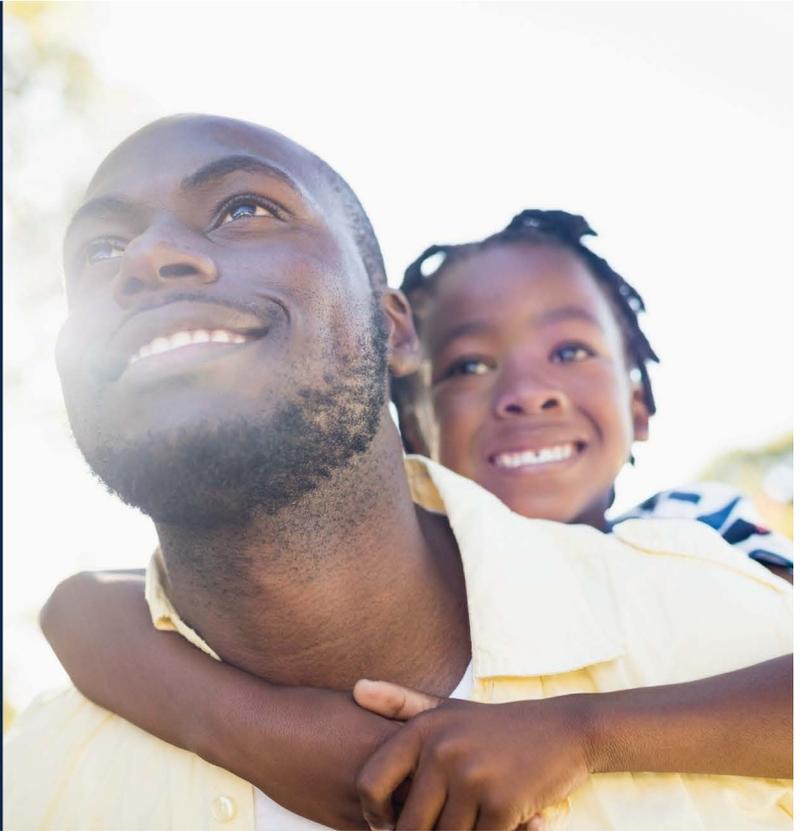
Acts 477 & 478: One Door Legislation & DCFS Reorg

Act 477 reorganizes DCFS into a **child-centered agency** dedicated to child welfare and child support

Act 478 transfers SNAP, DDS to LDH and workforce development program to LWC for **One Door** service delivery



DCFS is reimagining what the agency and our services look like, and that includes supporting fatherhood involvement & engagement as an important strategy to improve outcomes across family & child-focused systems in Louisiana.



DCFS Leaders: Fathers in Key Roles

Christopher Bahm
Undersecretary



Bret Hanemann
Assistant Secretary
Child Welfare



Sammy Guillory
Assistant Secretary
Family Support



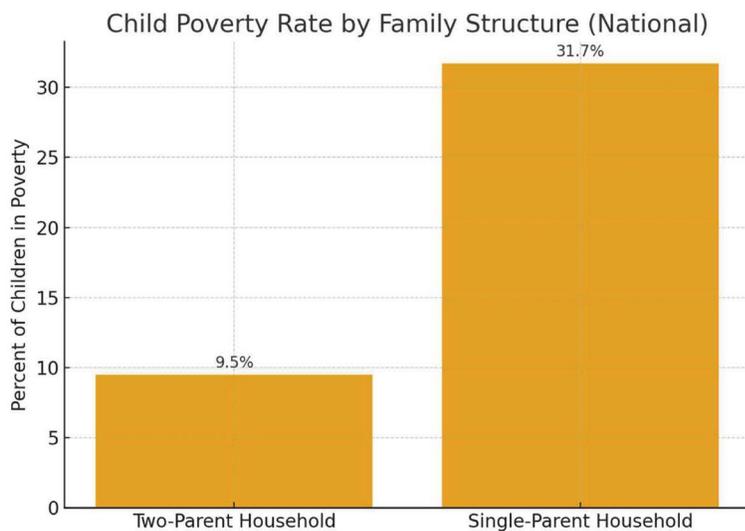
William Tilley
Deputy Asst. Sec.
Child Welfare



What the Data Tells Us



State Rankings: How Louisiana Stacks Up



**Highest male
incarceration rate
in nation**

**49 out of
50:
engaging fathers
in CW case
planning**

**out-of-wedlock
births**

Key Focus

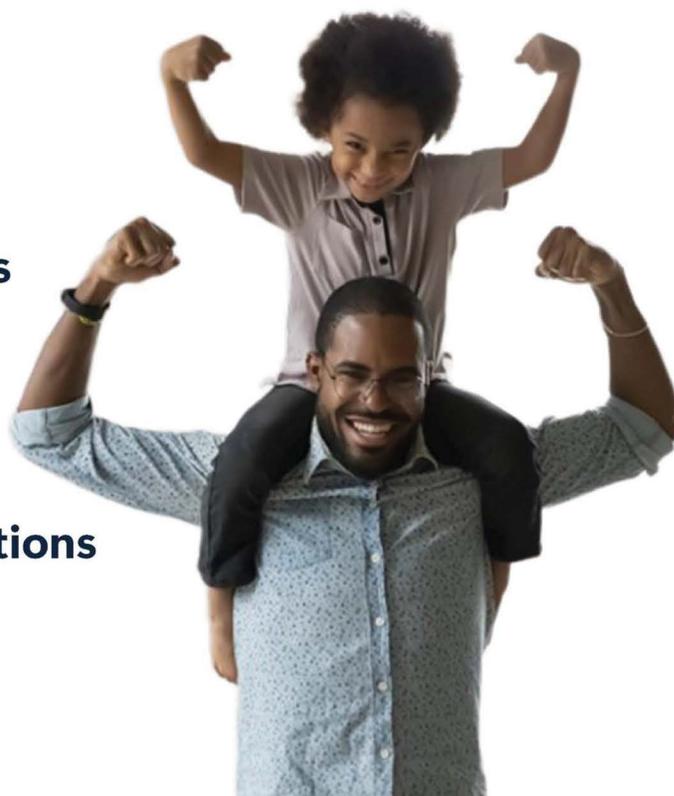
Areas:

 **Fatherhood Initiatives**

 **Access & Visitation**

 **Child Support Collections**

 **Child Welfare**



Focused on Better Outcomes
for Children & Families



Focus Area #1: Fatherhood Initiatives

Fatherhood engagement initiatives emphasize parenting skills & active involvement with their children

employment services

job readiness programs

community-based fatherhood programs

promote positive family outcomes

new RFQ to expand outreach & services

past partnership with FOAM: 470+ fathers served

Focus Area #2: Access & Visitation

Access & Visitation services in Orleans, Jefferson, EBR & Ascension parishes help noncustodial parents, particularly fathers, maintain consistent contact and strengthen emotional bonds with their children, contributing to improved child well-being and family stability.

remove barriers to visitation

provide mediation services

improve child well-being & family stability

strengthen emotional bonds

expand services statewide

Survey judges re: parenting time used in cs calculations

Focus Area #3: Child Support

Child Support collections ensure children receive financial support from both parents and provides noncustodial parents with resources to support their children in meaningful ways.

IV-D funds are used for enforcement activities & case management

fatherhood engagement services not eligible for IV-D funding

CSE partners with community organizations & local service providers

Programs offer parenting skills, co-parenting support

opportunities for personal development & economic stability

fosters positive parent-child relationships & meeting their responsibilities

Focus Area #4: Child Welfare

Child Welfare programs focus on protecting children from abuse and neglect while promoting permanency, safety and well-being.

policies reflect father inclusion, yet case reviews show gaps

supports family preservation & preventative services

CW locates fathers

Involves fathers in case planning

Resources promote positive parenting

Encourages fathers' active participation

Current & Past Efforts: Paternity Establishment FY24

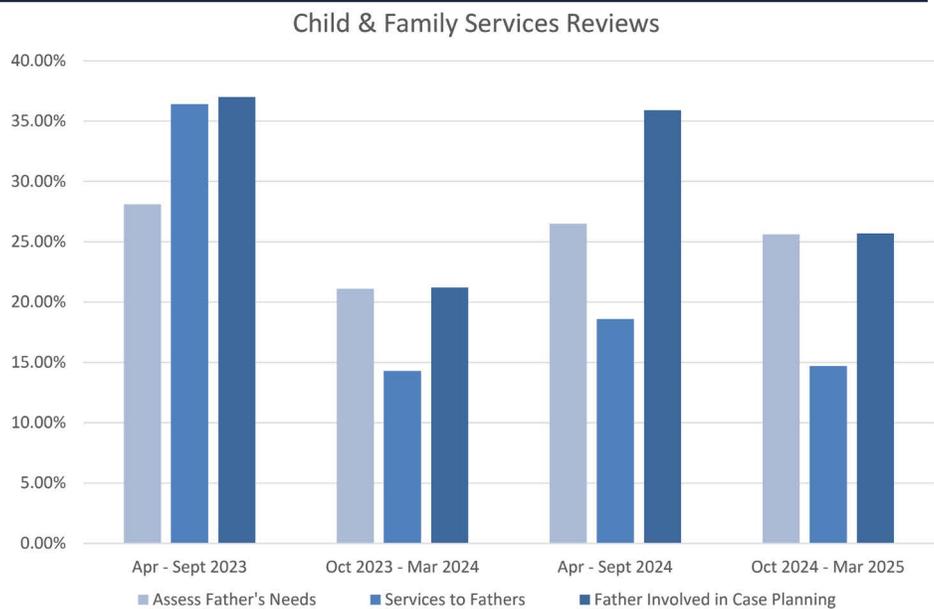
Updated policies require engaging fathers to provide additional support and resources at application, paternity establishment, and court proceedings.

Paternity Establishment	FY 2024
Total Children Born Out of Wedlock	178,464
Total Children with Paternity Established	176,079
CSE Paternity Established	95.21%
Existing Children Without Paternity	13,487

Current & Past Efforts: Child & Family Service Review

Updated policies require father inclusion in intake, assessment, and services.

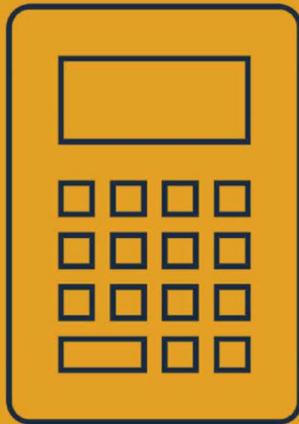
Fathers are represented in court proceedings.



We Invest in What's Important to Us



Federal Fiscal Year 24



There were **226,251 child support cases monthly** on average.

The State of Louisiana collected **nearly \$421 million in child support**

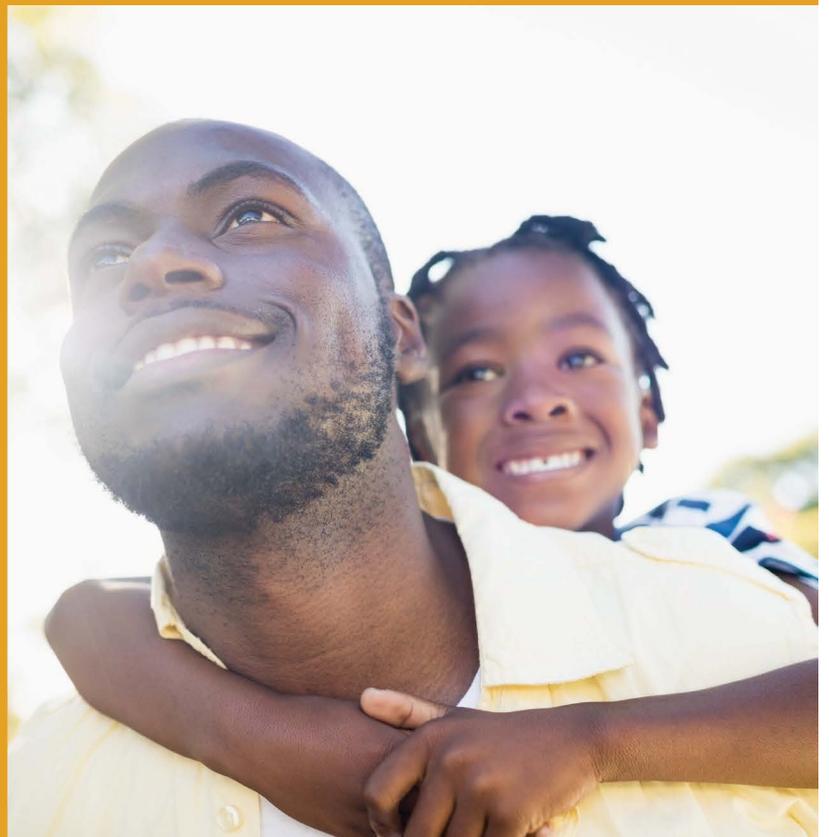
On the Road Again '24



DCFS Child Support collected **more than \$155,000** during OTRA promotion from **131 parents for 202 children**

Evidence-Based

Evidence shows there **must be a connection and wraparound between parenting, employment services, and case management** to be effective and improve outcomes for fathers.



Challenges & Opportunities



Challenges

As a department, fatherhood engagement has not been a focus.



Opportunities

Adopt evidence-based models; learn from other state programs



Thank You





Louisiana Department of Education



Fatherhood Engagement Task Force Agency Report

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 9

2025 Regular Session
December 15, 2025

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Executive Summary

The [Louisiana Department of Education](#) (LDOE) submits this report to the Louisiana Fatherhood Engagement Task Force, created through [Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 9 of the 2025 Regular Session](#). The Task Force requested each participating agency to develop a report on efforts to engage fathers. The LDOE's approach to family engagement is guided by [Louisiana's Education Priorities](#) and rooted in our mission to ensure every child is on track to graduate ready for a career, college, or service.

As a local control state, Louisiana entrusts school systems with operational authority to engage with families—including fathers—at the classroom, school, and district levels. The state's role is to provide policy guidance, set high expectations for student achievement, and offer tools and resources that support families in helping their children succeed academically. This includes mothers, fathers, grandparents, guardians, and caregivers.

Louisiana's "Back to Basics" approach prioritizes academics. Family engagement efforts are aligned to that goal by ensuring families remain informed and active partners throughout their child's educational journey. The LDOE centers its work on core foundational areas such as literacy, math, attendance, and high school readiness, while providing access to tools that help parents to make decisions and advocate for their children.

Some of the LDOE's family engagement efforts include:

- Implementing federal and state mandates such as Title I of ESSA, the Louisiana Family-School Partnership Act, and FERPA
- Providing data transparency through [school and district-level progress profiles](#)
- Ensuring access to student records, school meetings, and communications to foster meaningful parent participation
- Embedding family involvement expectations in early childhood, literacy initiatives, and school improvement efforts

While the LDOE does not administer father-specific programs, our engagement efforts include all parents and families. Data systems currently do not disaggregate information by parental role. Our work is grounded in the belief that the presence and involvement of family members—including fathers—has a positive impact on student outcomes. Throughout Louisiana, there are examples of fathers participating in literacy nights, IEP meetings, advisory groups, and engagement committees.

This report outlines:

- The LDOE’s current and past engagement efforts
- Legal and policy foundations for family involvement
- Opportunities for continued support through partnerships and system-level initiatives
- The agency’s commitment to families

Participation in engagement efforts such as the Fatherhood Engagement Task Force provides opportunities to collaborate with other agencies and stakeholders on ways to strengthen family support statewide.

The LDOE remains committed to its core responsibility: ensuring Louisiana students graduate high school prepared to enter their next season in life. We will continue to center our work on academic excellence while supporting families as they guide their child’s educational journey.

Introduction

Louisiana Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 9 of the 2025 Regular Session established the Fatherhood Engagement Task Force to explore how state agencies can better support and encourage the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. As part of this initiative, each participating agency was asked to report on its efforts to engage fathers and promote their active participation in their children’s development.

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) contributes to this work through its broader commitment to family engagement in support of student achievement. While the LDOE does not operate programs specific to parental roles, its engagement strategies are designed to serve all families—including fathers, mothers, grandparents, and guardians—by providing tools, information, and access to support their child’s learning and success.

The LDOE understands that the parent is a child’s first and foremost teacher. Our approach to engagement is shaped by two guiding elements:

- **Local Control:** Louisiana is a local control state. School systems have the autonomy to design and implement family engagement strategies that meet their communities’ needs.
- **Academic Excellence:** As part of the state’s “Back to Basics” approach, the LDOE’s core focus is on foundational academic outcomes. Engagement efforts are aligned to the mission of ensuring every student is supported to succeed in school and graduate prepared for life after high school.

Agency Overview

In a local control state like Louisiana, strong collaboration between state, district, and school levels is essential. Family engagement efforts are shaped by the roles each level plays, with the most direct and frequent engagement occurring in classrooms and schools.

Roles and Responsibilities: SEA, LEA & Schools

State Education Agency (SEA) – Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE)

The LDOE serves as the state education agency and holds overarching responsibility for setting statewide academic policy, monitoring compliance with federal and state laws, supporting and guiding local systems, and helping advance Louisiana's education priorities.

Key responsibilities include:

- Defining statewide academic standards, assessments, and accountability frameworks under the oversight of BESE.
- Distributing and managing state and federal education funding, and ensuring compliance with applicable requirements.
- Providing guidance, tools, research-based practices, and professional learning to support school systems and schools in implementing instructional and family engagement strategies.
- Publishing statewide and district performance data, including annual progress profiles as required by law (see R.S. 17:3912).
- Monitoring system and school performance, intervening when required, and facilitating improvement efforts.

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) – Parish/City School Systems

Each city or parish school board (LEA) in Louisiana operates public schools in its jurisdiction and holds local governance authority under state law (e.g., R.S. 17:81 – General powers of local public school boards). LEAs are responsible for translating the state's academic priorities into local practice while maintaining operational autonomy.

Key responsibilities include:

- Implementing policies, curriculum, and instructional programs aligned to state standards and assessments.

- Hiring and placing school personnel (teachers, administrators) subject to state certification and board policies.
- Developing and executing district-level plans for school improvement, family and community engagement, and student support.
- Facilitating effective communication with families and providing the tools and conditions for meaningful family involvement at schools.
- Operating schools, maintaining facilities, managing financial resources, and delivering educational services to students in their districts.

Individual Schools

Schools, as the frontline educational units, execute the instructional mission of the LEA and serve students and families directly. Schools are responsible for day-to-day teaching and learning and family engagement at the classroom and building level.

Key responsibilities include:

- Delivering high-quality instruction aligned with state standards as set out by the LEA and LDOE.
- Engaging families as partners in the students' learning journey—inviting parental involvement in homework, school meetings, conferences, and school activities.
- Providing timely communication to families on student progress, attendance, and participation, as required by law (for example, under the Parents' Bill of Rights, R.S. 17:406.9).
- Tracking and responding to student attendance, behavior, and achievement, and working with families and the LEA to implement supports.
- Maintaining a safe, well-managed learning environment, coordinating school resources, and implementing local family engagement strategies that reflect the community context.

Why This Matters for Family Engagement

Because Louisiana is a local control state, meaningful family engagement happens most effectively at the classroom, school, and LEA levels. The LDOE's role is to support and equip.

Clarity about roles helps align family engagement strategies with academic priorities while allowing local flexibility to meet community needs.

By understanding these levels, families, schools, and districts can navigate how they interact, how decisions are made, and how they can engage meaningfully in their child's education.

Louisiana's Education Priorities

Early childhood leading to kindergarten readiness

When we create a strong Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) system, working parents at all income levels can enjoy the peace of mind that comes with safe and stable care for their children, which leads to a more constant and productive workforce for Louisiana's economy. Moreover, children who attend high-quality ECCE programs are more likely to meet or exceed grade 3 standards.

Literacy instruction aligned to the Science of Reading

Literacy is a critical foundational skill for educational and lifelong success. Louisiana's ongoing research and evidence-based best practices led to our state's Louisiana Literacy pillars being the cornerstone of our literacy improvement work. Our pillars focus on setting and communicating goals, ensuring appropriate time is allotted for core instruction, providing ongoing support and development of educators, and honoring the key role families play in a child's literacy journey.

Math instruction from foundational to advanced skills

Student understanding of mathematics supports long-term success. Historically, students nationwide, including Louisiana, perform at lower levels as they progress through the grade levels. The Louisiana math pillars are designed to improve math outcomes.

Opportunities ensuring a meaningful high school experience

Students should be provided high school opportunities to increase academic achievement and allow exploration of career opportunities so that they make informed decisions about their paths after graduation.

An effective teacher for every student

Outside of the family, an effective teacher is the single most significant component of student learning. The best ways to improve effectiveness are job-embedded structures for collaboration and ongoing coaching.

Expand educational choice for students and families

School choice can improve education quality through competition and innovation, lead to better educational outcomes for families granted the flexibility to choose schools that best meet their children's needs, and increase parental satisfaction with their child's education.

Louisiana's BRAVE Plan for Education

Under the leadership of State Superintendent Dr. Cade Brumley, Louisiana has made historic education progress. His comprehensive BRAVE plan represents a bold vision to address the unique challenges facing our state while building on recent successes. By focusing on essential academic skills, empowering parents, valuing teaching professionals, and expanding educational freedom, Louisiana is charting a course to ensure every child receives a high-quality education.

Back to Basics

Schools were established to develop academic learning and skills in children. Schools should go back to basics with a laser focus on teaching fundamental academic content and skills. A back-to-basics approach will solidify knowledge with early learners and prepare them for the remainder of their academic career, work, and life.

Redesign High Schools

The world of work has changed; our high schools must adapt. Instead of processing students through antiquated experiences and coursework, we must commit to personalizing high school for each student, guaranteeing them a deliberate handoff to high-wage work, higher education, or service. High schools must adequately prepare students for success after graduation.

Accelerate Parental Rights

A child's first – and foremost – teacher is their parent. Anything to solidify and accelerate the fundamental rights of parents should be a priority. Parents must be in the driver's seat of their children's education. Parents send their children to school with a desire for their child to receive a quality education.

Value Teaching Professionals

Other than the parent, there's nothing more critical for student success than high-quality school teachers. As we move into the future, a comprehensive approach must be utilized to value teaching professionals. We must appreciate the significance of the profession and those who choose to serve the next generation. In an effort to value teaching professionals, we should frequently evaluate practices, policies, and pay and be responsive to needs.

Expand Education Freedom

In Louisiana, educational freedom opportunities should be abundant for families. We must seek to expand choice options and remove barriers to accessing the educational environments and models that make the most sense for students. In addition to high-quality traditional public schools, Louisiana should cultivate a stronger portfolio of options to include public charters, non-publics, and home-study programs. Students should not be mandated to attend failing schools simply because of their zip code. Instead, we must have expanded options that put families in the driver's seat for their child's education.

Historic Academic Progress

The LDOE has pursued a clear and disciplined strategy to improve student outcomes. This back to basics approach emphasizes literacy, numeracy, attendance, and high school readiness. These efforts prioritize essential academic skills, empowers families, values teaching professionals, and expands educational opportunities.

This focused work has led to historic academic progress.

Unprecedented Academic Success

In 2024, Louisiana captured national attention with unprecedented gains on The Nation's Report Card (NAEP), the most respected national measure of student achievement:

- Louisiana climbed from 49th to 32nd in overall ranking—its highest placement since NAEP began.
- 4th graders in Louisiana led the nation in reading growth for the second consecutive assessment cycle (2022 and 2024).
- 4th grade math performance ranked in the top five nationally for growth.
- Louisiana was one of only two states where 4th graders surpassed pre-pandemic scores in both reading and math.
- 8th grade math saw notable gains, with Louisiana among 14 states to improve.
- Students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students exceeded the national average in both achievement and growth.

Fastest Academic Recovery in the Nation

Just weeks after the NAEP results, the Education Recovery Scorecard—a national study from Harvard and Stanford—ranked Louisiana:

- #1 in the nation for reading recovery
- #2 for math recovery

Importantly, Louisiana is the only state where the average student has completed their academic recovery since the pandemic.

These results are not the product of isolated efforts. Louisiana's gains are the result of a coordinated, multi-level commitment to focus on what matters most.

Legal and Policy Foundations for Family Engagement

***Note:** This is not a comprehensive review of all state or federal education laws. The examples included here highlight key statutes and policies most relevant to family engagement as they relate to the goals of this report.*

Louisiana's education system is governed by a framework of state and federal laws that recognize and support the vital role of families in a child's education. These laws establish the rights of parents and guardians, set expectations for schools and school systems, and guide how the LDOE supports meaningful family engagement across academic settings.

These examples demonstrate how existing education policy affirms the role of families—including fathers—as essential partners in student success.

Federal Laws

Title I, Part A: Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Under Title I, Part A, parent and family engagement is a statutory requirement for districts and schools receiving federal funds. The [January 2025 U.S. Department of Education guidance](#) outlines the following key provisions:

LEA Parent and Family Engagement Policy

- Required under ESEA Section 1116(a)
- Each local education agency (LEA) must develop jointly with and distribute to parents a written parent and family engagement policy
- The policy must be reviewed and updated periodically to meet changing family and school needs
- The LEA must involve parents in planning and implementation, and coordinate with other relevant federal, state, and local programs

School-Level Parent and Family Engagement Policy

- Under Section 1116(b), each Title I school must also develop its own policy, jointly with parents, describing how the school will:
 - Convene annual meetings;
 - Offer flexible meetings and involvement opportunities;
 - Provide timely information and describe curricula and assessments;
 - Build capacity for involvement.

School-Parent Compact

- Required by Section 1116(d).
- Must outline:
 - Shared responsibilities for student achievement;
 - How the school and parents will build and maintain partnerships;
 - The importance of regular two-way communication and student support.

Capacity Building and Support

- Under Section 1116(e):
 - Schools must assist parents in understanding academic standards and state assessments;
 - Provide materials and training to support learning at home;
 - Educate staff on working with parents as equal partners;
 - Ensure information is provided in a format and language families understand;
 - Offer support for parent involvement activities upon request.

Funding Requirement

- LEAs receiving more than \$500,000 in Title I, Part A funds must reserve at least 1% of those funds for parent and family engagement activities.
- Of the 1%, at least 90% must be distributed to schools.
- Schools must use these funds with input from parents.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ([FERPA](#))

FERPA is the federal law that protects the privacy of student records. FERPA grants parents the right to access their child's educational records, request amendments, and control disclosure of personally identifiable information. These rights transfer to the student once they turn 18. In Louisiana, both custodial and noncustodial parents retain FERPA rights, unless a court order states otherwise.

Louisiana Laws

Louisiana law affirms the central role of parents and guardians in their children's education. State statutes and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) policies require schools and districts to involve families in educational planning, communication, and oversight.

Louisiana Children's Code

The Louisiana Children's Code acknowledges the family as the most fundamental unit of human society and emphasizes the paramount right of parents to raise their children in accordance with their values and traditions. The law recognizes that state intervention in family life must be limited and only exercised in cases of serious threat. This underscores the legal basis for respecting and prioritizing parental involvement in all areas of a child's life, including education.

The Family-School Partnership Act (R.S. 17:406–406.9)

Louisiana has established a strong legal framework to support the role of families in public education. The Family-School Partnership Act (Louisiana Revised Statutes 17:406 through 406.9) outlines the state’s legislative findings, responsibilities of schools and districts, and specific rights for parents. This law affirms that parental involvement is essential to student success.

- **Legislative Intent and Purpose:** Recognizes that parental involvement directly impacts academic achievement, acknowledges the evolving structure of families, and emphasizes the need for responsive and coordinated policies across agencies.
- **Parent-Teacher Conferences:** Requires schools to schedule at least two parent-teacher conferences annually. Parents or guardians must attend at least one, unless deemed unnecessary by the teacher. Schools must not penalize students for non-attendance by parents.
- **Parenting Classes and Community Partnerships:** Encourages schools to offer or partner to provide parenting classes that: improve student performance and family engagement and help families use technology, manage homework, and prepare for postsecondary success.

Louisiana Parents’ Bill of Rights (R.S. 17:406.9)

Part of the Family-School Partnership Act, this statute enumerates key rights granted to parents of public school students who have not reached the age of majority, including:

- The right to examine textbooks, curriculum, and supplemental materials used in the child’s classroom.
- The right to inspect and receive a copy of the child’s school records within ten business days of submitting a written request, without appearing in person.
- The right to timely notification of medical services, criminal actions involving the child, law-enforcement questioning, and removal from campus without permission.
- The right to opt out of certain surveys or instruction on sexual activity, and to receive notice of annual fees, uniform requirements, and the school calendar.
- The statute includes a non-discrimination clause based on a family’s sincerely held religious beliefs and specifies exceptions for disclosure of certain records during active investigations.

Attendance and Truancy (R.S. 17:233)

Louisiana law requires regular student attendance and sets clear expectations for addressing habitual absence or tardiness.

- Habitual absence or tardiness is defined in [R.S. 17:233](#) as a student having five or more unexcused absences or tardies in a single semester. After these thresholds, and following failed corrective efforts, students may be referred to juvenile or family court as truant children under the Children's Code.
- Parental responsibility is also addressed. [R.S. 17:233](#) states that the parent or legal guardian must ensure the student catches up on missed schoolwork through after-school tutoring, weekend classes, or other remediation. Parents may be required to attend monthly school meetings and assist with addressing academic concerns.
- Penalties for parents of students in grades K–8 who are habitually absent or tardy may include fines up to \$50 or community service (first offense) and increased penalties for repeat violations under [R.S. 17:233](#).
- Schools are required to notify parents in writing by the third unexcused absence or tardy and hold a mandatory conference to discuss attendance expectations and legal consequences.
- Driving privileges for students under 18 may be denied or suspended by the Department of Public Safety and Corrections if a student is habitually absent or tardy.
- Legal accountability is tailored to custodial arrangements. The parent who has actual custody or visitation on the day of the absence or tardy is responsible [under the law](#).

These legal provisions work in tandem with Louisiana's [Power of Presence](#) statewide attendance strategy, which includes clear roles for schools, families, and community systems. The law emphasizes not just student compliance, but coordinated efforts between schools, courts, and families to reduce chronic absenteeism and improve academic outcomes.

Academic Transparency and Progress Profiles

[R.S. 17:3912](#) requires the LDOE to annually publish school report cards, also called progress profiles, for every public school in the state. These must include student performance data and accountability indicators, be publicly accessible on the LDOE website, distributed to parents at no cost, and written in a clear, understandable format. This supports academic transparency and informed decision-making by families.

Expanded Parent Access Rights: [R.S. 17:355](#) and [Act 103 \(2025\)](#)

In addition to schoolwide transparency, Act 103 of the 2025 Regular Session significantly expanded individual parental access rights to student information. The act revised R.S. 17:355, affirming that:

- Parents have the right to access and inspect all instructional materials, assessments, surveys, and student records related to their child, including any digital platforms used for instruction or grading.
- Schools must provide access within 10 business days of a written request.
- The statute covers both custodial and noncustodial parents, unless access is restricted by a court order.
- Act 103 ensures these rights are not limited to physical documents but extend to electronic records, digital learning tools, and online portals.
- School systems are encouraged to proactively communicate how parents can access this information, reinforcing their role as partners in education.

This enhanced access complements [R.S. 17:3912](#) by empowering families with both aggregate performance data (school report cards) and student-specific information, creating a more complete foundation for engagement.

Student Privacy and Records Access (R.S. 17:3914)

This statute affirms a parent’s right to access and inspect their child’s educational records stored in school systems. It defines the types of personally identifiable information that may not be collected without consent, sets parameters for secure access, and prohibits unauthorized sharing of student data. In addition to reinforcing federal FERPA protections, Louisiana law imposes specific requirements for transparency, parental consent, and data security. Schools must allow parents of unemancipated minors—and students over 18 or emancipated—to access relevant student records within clearly defined legal boundaries.

In line with federal FERPA regulations and Louisiana’s R.S. 17:3914, both custodial and non-custodial parents are entitled to access their child’s education records, unless restricted by a legal document such as a court order or custody agreement.

Student Proficiency in Literacy and Math (R.S. 17:24.10 and Act 650 of 2024)

Foundational academic skills in literacy and math are key predictors of student success in school and beyond. Louisiana law affirms the importance of early identification, intervention, and family partnership in supporting students who are not performing at grade level.

Literacy Requirements

Louisiana law requires annual literacy screening for students in kindergarten through grade 3 to determine reading proficiency.

Early Identification and Family Notification

- If a student is not reading on grade level, schools must:
 - Develop an individual reading improvement plan (IRIP) collaboratively with the teacher, school leader, and parent/guardian.
 - Notify the parent in writing and invite them to participate in developing the IRIP.
 - Use evidence-based strategies in the plan and update it regularly based on student progress.

Third Grade Promotion Policy

- Students not reading on grade level by the end of third grade:
 - May be required to attend a summer literacy intervention program.
 - May have promotion to fourth grade delayed without demonstrated improvement, unless exempted.

Support and Interventions

- Schools must provide:
 - Targeted supports such as small-group instruction, tutoring, and summer programs.
 - Ongoing communication with families on progress and strategies.

Parental Rights and Roles

- Under the Parents' Bill of Rights (R.S. 17:406.9), families must receive timely information about:
 - Assessment results
 - Student progress toward reading goals
 - Available supports and instructional changes

Math/Numeracy Requirements

In 2024, the Louisiana Legislature passed Act 650, extending early screening and support requirements to mathematics, modeled after the successful approach in literacy.

Numeracy Screener Implementation

- Beginning in the 2025–2026 school year, school systems will implement a state-approved numeracy screener for grades K–3.
- The LDOE issued [interim guidance](#) for 2024–2025, allowing systems to begin early adoption using tools aligned with the Numeracy Screening Requirements.

Identification and Notification

- If a student is identified as not on track in math, schools must:
 - Notify the parent or guardian in writing
 - Develop and implement a math intervention plan using evidence-based strategies

Future Expectations

- Once fully implemented, the numeracy screener will:
 - Mirror the literacy model in identifying and supporting at-risk students early
 - Ensure parents are notified and included in intervention planning
 - Help schools provide timely, targeted supports in foundational math skills

Current and Past Agency Efforts to Engage Families

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) supports a wide range of programs, initiatives, and resources to promote meaningful engagement between schools, families, and communities. These efforts span early childhood through high school and aim to empower families—including fathers—to support student success. While the LDOE does not maintain data disaggregated by parental role, our family engagement strategies are structured to reach all caregivers, including fathers, mothers, grandparents, and guardians.

Federal Title Programs

The LDOE provides structured, ongoing support to ensure LEAs implement parent and family engagement (PAFE) practices that meet federal requirements under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Through clear expectations, tools for implementation, and direct technical assistance, the LDOE actively supports school systems in meeting the federal requirements for parent and family engagement, helping ensure families, including fathers and other caregivers, are meaningfully included in the education of their children.

The LDOE's approach emphasizes compliance, capacity building, and continuous improvement by offering both technical guidance and practical tools to school systems.

Key Supports Include:

Monitoring and Documentation Support

To support program monitoring, the LDOE provides tools for documenting required activities, including:

- Sample agendas and sign-in sheets for annual Title I meetings
- Evidence of two-way communication with families
- Evaluations used to measure the effectiveness of PAFE efforts

These resources help LEAs prepare for Consolidated Monitoring Reviews and ensure that PAFE is embedded in schoolwide planning and reporting.

Capacity Building and Professional Learning

The LDOE offers training and technical assistance through:

- Statewide webinars and workshops
- Individualized coaching during monitoring cycles
- Resources for building the capacity of both school staff and families

These efforts are aligned with ESSA Section 1116(e), which requires SEAs and LEAs to strengthen family-school partnerships through targeted support.

Cross-Program Alignment

The LDOE promotes collaboration between federal programs such as Title I, Title III, and McKinney-Vento to ensure consistent and accessible engagement strategies for all families.

Implementing Federal Parent and Family Engagement

Federal law under Title I, Part A establishes expectations for how parent and family engagement must be implemented across education systems. Parent and family engagement is a shared responsibility across schools, systems, and the state. While schools and districts are on the front lines of implementation, the LDOE plays a critical role in ensuring compliance and helping to build capacity.

School-Level Responsibilities

Each Title I school must:

- Develop a School-Level Parent and Family Engagement Policy in collaboration with families (ESEA §1116[b]).
- Convene an annual Title I meeting to inform families about program requirements and rights.
- Offer flexible family engagement opportunities (e.g., meetings at varied times, child care, translation).
- Develop a School-Parent Compact that outlines:
 - Shared responsibility for improving academic outcomes;
 - Strategies to foster home-school communication;
 - How parents, school staff, and students will collaborate for success (ESEA §1116[d]).
- Provide timely information to families about curriculum, assessments, and academic expectations.
- Build the capacity of families to support learning at home through training, materials, and communication.

District/System-Level Responsibilities (LEA Responsibilities)

Each Local Education Agency (LEA) must:

- Develop a districtwide Parent and Family Engagement Policy, in consultation with families (ESEA §1116[a]).
- Reserve at least 1% of Title I funds for family engagement if the total allocation exceeds \$500,000, and ensure 90% of that amount is distributed to schools.
- Involve parents in decisions about how Title I PAFE funds are used.
- Coordinate and integrate PAFE strategies with other programs (e.g., McKinney-Vento, Title III).
- Conduct an annual evaluation of PAFE activities to assess barriers and improve programming.
- Provide professional development for school staff on working with families as equal partners.

State-Level Responsibilities (LDOE Responsibilities)

The LDOE supports implementation through:

- Monitoring and compliance: The Department reviews PAFE implementation as part of federal program monitoring and provides feedback to ensure alignment with ESSA requirements.
- Technical assistance and training:
 - Webinars, workshops, and one-on-one support;
 - Support for building the capacity of school and district leaders;
 - Clarification on allowable use of PAFE funds.

Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)

Access to reliable, high-quality child care is essential for Louisiana families to thrive, especially for those balancing work, school, and parenting responsibilities. Through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Louisiana helps reduce this burden by providing financial support to qualifying low-income families, ensuring that more children can benefit from safe, enriching early learning environments.

CCAP provides financial assistance to help cover the cost of child care for eligible families while parents or guardians are:

- Working at least 20 hours per week
- Attending an accredited school or training program full-time or for 20+ hours per week
- Engaged in a combination of work and school
- Actively seeking employment
- Participating in a transitional living program
- Experiencing homelessness

Eligible children must be U.S. citizens or eligible immigrants residing in Louisiana and be either:

- Under age 13, or
- Under age 18 with a disability supported by:
 - Disability income
 - An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)
 - A physician's statement indicating special needs

To qualify, families must meet specific income thresholds based on gross monthly income before deductions.

Recognizing the challenges families may face in navigating the application process, the LDOE provides user-friendly support tools:

- Instructional Videos and Guides: The Remember Guide and Case Not Certified resources walk families through common errors and offer step-by-step guidance for submitting applications through the CAFE portal.
- Application Checklist: Clearly outlines required documents and eligibility criteria, helping reduce delays and incomplete applications.
- Eligibility FAQs: Provide quick answers to common household questions.

By making child care more affordable and accessible, CCAP supports working families while promoting school readiness and healthy development for Louisiana's youngest learners.

Family Support Resources

The LDOE maintains a comprehensive [family support resources library](#) on its website to equip families with tools to support student success from early childhood through high school graduation. These resources are designed with accessibility, clarity, and practical use in mind, ensuring families are informed, engaged, and empowered partners in the educational journey.

Housed within the Families & Students section of the website, this curated library includes downloadable activities, parent guides, translated materials, testing support, special education information, and tools for navigating high school and postsecondary planning.

Literacy and Math Support

In alignment with Louisiana’s education priorities, many of the Department’s family-facing resources focus on foundational academic skills—particularly literacy and math.

Literacy Tools

- Building Literacy Skills at Home activity sets are available for every age and stage, from infancy through high school, and in multiple languages.
- Grab and Go Literacy Activities include themed resources like book clubs, recipe-based reading, career vocabulary, and writing games to strengthen engagement at home.
- Family Literacy Engagement Tools include surveys, READ Camp materials, and third-grade literacy letters to keep families informed and involved.

Math Tools

- Zearn Math Challenges allow families to join statewide efforts to encourage students to complete high-quality math lessons online.
- Grab and Go Math Activities provide step-by-step instructions for at-home learning using common household materials—helping families support early numeracy and problem-solving skills.

Special Education Resources

The LDOE supports families of children with disabilities through a robust suite of special education tools:

- Educational Rights Guides, available in multiple languages, help families understand their rights and procedural safeguards.
- Dispute Resolution Services offer confidential support through an ombudsman, along with guidance on mediation and complaint processes.
- Family Networks and Partnerships like Exceptional Lives and Families Helping Families provide direct support and connections to community-based services.
- School Choice for Exceptionalities offers information on tuition assistance for students with disabilities.

State Testing Tools

The Family State Testing Resources page helps families prepare for standardized assessments by providing:

- Parent Guides for LEAP, ELPT, LEAP Connect, and more (translated into multiple languages)
- Practice Tests aligned to state assessments
- School and Center Finder Tools to review academic performance and find programs

These resources are designed to improve transparency and help families make informed decisions about their child's academic progress.

Tutoring and Academic Recovery

To accelerate academic recovery and expand access to support, Louisiana has launched several tutoring programs:

- Steve Carter Tutoring Program: Offers \$1,500 vouchers to eligible K–12 students for after-school tutoring in reading and math.
- Accelerate: High-Dosage Tutoring: Provides in-school tutoring services for K–5 students performing below proficiency. School systems manage program implementation, with families encouraged to contact their local district for eligibility and scheduling.

These tutoring resources are part of the broader Louisiana Tutoring Initiative and align with the Department's goal to provide academic interventions that support both students and their families.

Graduation and Postsecondary Planning

Families can access guidance on:

- High school graduation requirements
- Dual enrollment and career pathways (e.g., Fast Forward, Jump Start)
- Diploma endorsements
- Financial aid planning and FAFSA completion
- College and career readiness resources

These tools are available on the “Preparing to Graduate” section of the LDOE website and support families in navigating the path from high school to meaningful postsecondary opportunities.

Parent Voice in Policy and Planning

The LDOE recognizes that strong, effective policies must be shaped in collaboration with those most impacted by them—students, families, and educators. Parents and caregivers play a vital role in shaping education policies, priorities, and resources in Louisiana. The Department is committed to providing meaningful opportunities for family engagement in state-level planning and decision-making.

Parents are represented across a wide range of LDOE-led advisory groups, ensuring their perspectives are embedded in both long-term planning and issue-specific initiatives. These advisory bodies allow families to share feedback, influence guidance, and help shape resources designed to improve student outcomes.

Key examples of parent and family participation include:

Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)

Parents of students with disabilities are appointed to SEAP to provide input on policies affecting special education services, IDEA implementation, and support for students with exceptionalities.

Louisiana Center for Effective Transitions (LCET)

Families collaborate with education and workforce professionals to support successful transitions from school to postsecondary life for students with disabilities.

Accountability Council

Parents are included alongside educators, advocates, and business leaders to review and provide feedback on Louisiana’s K–12 accountability system and its alignment with student outcomes.

Early Childhood Care and Education Advisory Council

Parent representatives contribute to shaping Louisiana’s early childhood system, ensuring that family perspectives are central to policy and program development.

Early Childhood Care and Education Commission

This legislative commission includes stakeholders, including parents, to provide recommendations for expanding access to high-quality early care and education.

Content Standards Review Committees

When Louisiana revises academic standards, parents are invited to serve on review committees to help ensure the standards reflect high expectations and community values.

English Learner Task Force

This time-bound group included family advocates to guide improvements in support for multilingual learners and their families.

Success Through Attendance Recovery (STAR) Task Force

Families participated in this initiative to identify effective strategies for reducing chronic absenteeism and re-engaging students in learning.

These structures help ensure parent voice is not only welcomed but embedded in the continuous improvement of Louisiana's education system. The Department remains committed to maintaining and expanding avenues for meaningful stakeholder engagement as part of its broader mission to serve all students and families.

School Choice Options for Louisiana Families

Expanding educational choice is one of Louisiana's core education priorities. Grounded in the belief that parents are their child's first and most important teachers, Louisiana supports families with the ability to choose the educational environment that best meets the unique needs of their children. Through traditional public schools, charter schools, nonpublic options, home study, and specialized scholarship programs, Louisiana is committed to expanding high-quality opportunities and ensuring that no child is limited by their zip code.

Louisiana families can access a wide range of school choice options:

- Traditional Public Schools: Open to all students and operated by local school systems, these schools follow state-approved standards and are funded by public dollars.

- Charter Schools: Public schools operated by nonprofit boards with increased autonomy in exchange for increased accountability. Charter schools offer innovative approaches to learning while remaining aligned with state standards.
- Nonpublic Schools: Approved nonpublic schools offer families a private school option that meets specific state requirements. They may provide unique curricula, faith-based programs, or specialized instruction to fit family preferences.
- Home Study Programs: Parents may educate their children at home through the BESE-Approved Home Study Program, giving them full control over curriculum, instruction, and pace. The Louisiana Department of Education supports families through the home study registration process and access to select state resources.
- Nonpublic Schools Not Seeking State Approval: Operated independently without state oversight, these schools offer maximum flexibility in curriculum and instruction for families choosing a more individualized approach.

LA GATOR Scholarship Program

In 2025, Louisiana launched the LA GATOR Scholarship Program (Giving All True Opportunity to Rise). Created by Act 1 of the 2024 Legislative Session and signed into law by Governor Jeff Landry, this groundbreaking initiative establishes Education Scholarship Accounts (ESAs) for eligible families.

The ESA program empowers parents to fully customize their child's education by using state-funded accounts for approved education services such as:

- Private school tuition and fees
- Tutoring and educational therapies
- Textbooks and instructional materials
- Uniforms and transportation
- Dual enrollment and advanced coursework

This program represents a historic step forward in education freedom for Louisiana families, giving them unprecedented control over how and where their children learn.

Course Choice

Louisiana's Course Choice program provides students access to high-value courses not available at their school. Parents play a vital role in helping identify and support these opportunities. These may include:

- Dual enrollment
- Advanced Placement courses
- Career and technical education
- ACT/SAT prep
- High-quality credit recovery

Course Choice funding is prioritized to support students with the greatest academic and career needs, including:

- Graduation or TOPS (Taylor Opportunity Program for Students) eligibility
- Fast Forward career pathways
- College credit opportunities
- Students in CIR/UIR-A designated schools
- Academic and career recovery
- Test preparation
- Locally defined needs in the district's pupil progression plan

Additional School Choice Programs

- School Choice for Certain Students with Exceptionalities: This program provides tuition assistance for students with disabilities to attend eligible nonpublic schools that can meet their specialized needs.
- Tuition Donation Credit Program: Offers Louisiana taxpayers the opportunity to donate to nonprofit organizations that provide scholarships to low-income students attending approved nonpublic schools. Donors receive a state tax credit, and participating students gain access to additional educational opportunities.

Website Redesign

In January 2025, the LDOE launched a [redesigned agency website](#) as part of its broader commitment to transparency, family engagement, and user-centered services. This new digital platform represents a significant improvement in how families, educators, and the public access essential information about Louisiana's education system.

The website redesign was a strategic step to modernize the LDOE's communication and engagement tools, addressing longstanding concerns from users about the difficulty of navigating the Department's previous site. It aligns with the Department's goal to make resources more accessible and ensure that all families — including fathers and non-traditional caregivers — can easily find the information they need to support their children's learning.

Key Features Supporting Family Engagement

- **Dedicated Family and Student Page:** The new "Families & Students" section provides a centralized hub for parent-friendly resources, including guidance on academic standards, student progress, early literacy and math, high school planning, and how to navigate educational choices.
- **Improved Navigation Tools:** A pop-out site map, grouped quick links, and expandable document lists help users locate information faster, especially across priority areas like early childhood, attendance, special education, and high school readiness.
- **Mobile-Responsive Design:** The new site is mobile-friendly, making it easier for families to access content on smartphones and tablets — a critical feature given the widespread use of mobile devices among parents and caregivers.
- **Redirects from the Previous Website:** To ensure a smooth transition, users who visit the Department's former site (LouisianaBelieves.com) are automatically redirected to the new platform.
- **Priority Content Visibility:** The homepage now highlights news, alerts, and timely guidance, including academic initiatives, assessments, policy updates, and available support for families.

Intentional Design for Stakeholder Needs

The website was built with direct input from stakeholders, including parents, educators, and school system leaders. Content is organized by audience group to help visitors find resources that are relevant to their role in the education system. Audience-specific homepages include:

- Families & Students
- Educators
- School & System Leaders
- Early Childhood Providers

Each page consolidates tools, communications, and resources most relevant to those users, offering a more intuitive experience and supporting more consistent engagement.

Foundation for Ongoing Engagement

The website redesign is a foundational investment that supports the LDOE's broader family engagement strategy. With millions of site visits each year, this platform serves as a key access point for families and reflects the agency's commitment to improving communication, transparency, and service delivery.

As the LDOE continues to modernize its operations and outreach, the site will serve as an evolving tool to support local systems and ensure families are informed partners in their child's education.

Revised Accountability System

Louisiana's revised K-12 accountability system, Grow. Achieve. Thrive., is designed to increase transparency and help families better understand how their schools and school systems are performing. Built around three core student expectations, the system provides clear, actionable data to empower parents and caregivers in advocating for their children's education.

Student Expectations in the Revised System

- **Grow:** Students are expected to show annual academic growth in English and math. Special attention is given to the lowest-achieving students and English learners to ensure equitable progress.
- **Achieve:** Students should achieve proficiency in English, math, science, and social studies.
- **Thrive:** High schools will be measured on how well they prepare students for life after graduation, including on-time graduation rates, readiness demonstrated through nationally recognized exams, and participation in accelerated coursework or career pathways.

Transparency for Families

The new system simplifies school ratings through a 100-point scale and straightforward school scorecards. Each school's performance will be evaluated using evenly weighted measures tied directly to student outcomes. This means that parents will no longer need to decipher complex formulas or navigate multiple datasets to understand how their child's school is doing. Instead, they'll have access to clear, concise, and meaningful information.

Key benefits for families include:

- Clearer school report cards with consistent metrics across grade bands
- Stronger alignment to student readiness, including college and career indicators that reflect real-world preparation
- Improved communication about student academic progress, proficiency, and future preparedness
- Publicly available data through Louisiana's School and Center Finder and other online tools to help parents make informed decisions

Family Input in Accountability Design

Over the course of several years, the LDOE engaged with families, educators, and community members to develop this new model. Input from parents informed the emphasis on student growth and simplified reporting. Moving forward, families will continue to be an essential part of the state's effort to refine and implement the system.

The Power of Presence: Louisiana's Statewide Attendance Strategy

In Louisiana, student attendance is not only a legal requirement, it's a foundational element of student success. Research is clear: students who miss more school are more likely to struggle academically and less likely to graduate. To combat rising rates of chronic absenteeism and support student learning, the LDOE has launched [The Power of Presence](#), a comprehensive statewide attendance strategy focused on prevention, early intervention, and family engagement.

Every absence matters. Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more of school days for any reason, undermines student outcomes at every grade level. From learning to read in early elementary to earning credits toward graduation, consistent attendance gives students the best opportunity to succeed. In Louisiana, over 1 in 3 students were chronically absent during the 2022–2023 school year.

Family Engagement and the Role of Parents

Parents and guardians are a child's first and most important teacher, and their presence, support, and advocacy are critical to ensuring consistent school attendance. The LDOE's attendance strategy highlights the central role families play in keeping students on track:

- **Tiered Supports Involving Families:** The Power of Presence encourages schools to use a three-tiered system of support, starting with positive relationship-building and clear expectations, and including targeted outreach to families when attendance becomes a concern.
- **Responsive Engagement:** The strategy promotes respectful, proactive communication that builds trust between schools and families and recognizes the diverse challenges that may impact attendance.

Collaborative Problem-Solving: Schools are encouraged to work with parents to identify and address barriers to attendance, such as transportation, health issues, or family responsibilities.

Through partnerships with families, schools can help shift the conversation from one of compliance to one of opportunity: showing up to school is how students access the relationships, resources, and instruction they need to thrive.

Legal Responsibilities of Parents Under Louisiana Law

Louisiana law places clear responsibility on parents and guardians to ensure regular school attendance. Key statutes include:

- Compulsory Attendance (La. R.S. 17:221): All children between the ages of 7 and 18 must attend a public or approved private school unless legally exempt. Parents are responsible for ensuring compliance.
- Excused vs. Unexcused Absences (BESE Bulletin 741 §1103): School systems must define excused and unexcused absences. Excessive unexcused absences may trigger academic consequences, such as loss of credit, and legal interventions.
- Habitual Absenteeism and Truancy (La. R.S. 17:233): A student is considered truant after unexcused absences on 5 days in a school semester. Habitual absenteeism requires school systems to notify families and engage in a series of escalating interventions.
- Parental Notification and Support: Schools are required to notify parents promptly when attendance becomes an issue and provide opportunities to meet and develop improvement plans.

The law affirms what families already know: presence matters. LDOE's updated strategy is designed to support schools in fulfilling these requirements while partnering with parents to find practical solutions.

Tools and Resources for Families

To help families stay informed and engaged in supporting attendance, the LDOE offers:

- The Power of Presence Toolkit for schools and families
- Parent Communication Templates and outreach best practices
- Technical Assistance for School Systems on engaging families in attendance improvement

Opportunities and Future Work

Parent and Family Engagement Task Force

Overview

The Parent and Family Engagement Task Force was established by [HR 239 of the 2024 Regular Legislative Session](#) to examine ways the state can better support parent and family engagement in education. The resolution assembled stakeholders to study best practices and to make recommendations that strengthen the role of families to support student learning. The resolution also asked the group to explore how public-private partnerships can be leveraged to enhance parent and family engagement, and ultimately student outcomes.

Over four meetings held in 2025, task force members discussed the barriers and opportunities families face at every stage of their child's education from early childhood to high school graduation. Presentations from educators, state leaders, and partner organizations helped inform discussion, while large-group conversations surfaced a wide range of potential recommendation topics. Members emphasized the need to improve communication structures, ensure tools are accessible, elevate parent voices, and support both educators and families in building meaningful relationships.

Their report outlines the group's work and presents five formal recommendation areas for advancing parent and family engagement statewide. These recommendations offer both policy-level guidance and practical strategies that systems, schools, agencies, and organizations can implement. Together, they reflect the belief that families are essential in student success.

Focus Areas and Recommendations

The Parent and Family Engagement Task Force developed a framework for recommendations centered on a core belief: parents are the primary decision-makers in their child's educational journey, and family engagement should affirm and support this role. This central focus area, *Affirming the Role of the Parent*, serves as the foundation for all other recommendations.

To advance this core principle, the task force also identified four supporting focus areas. These supporting areas (*Partnerships and Collaboration*, *Communication, Clarity, and Access*, *Support and Capacity Building*, and *Financial and Policy Alignment*) offer recommendations for schools, systems, agencies, and community partners to support families. Together, these focus areas reinforce the goal of strengthening families' ability to make informed choices and engage meaningfully in their child's academic success.

Public-private partnerships was also a specific priority of HR 239 (2024), and is reflected throughout the recommendations. Business and community organizations are critical allies in expanding opportunities. These partnerships help connect families with real-world learning, mentorship, career pathways, and enrichment.

Core Focus Area: Affirming the Role of the Parent

The Louisiana Children's Code affirms that "the relationship between parent and child is preeminent," and that parents have the "paramount right to raise their children in accordance with their own values and traditions." Families are the most fundamental unit of society, and parents play the primary role in determining the best educational path for their children.

Educators, schools, and school systems are essential partners who collaborate with families and provide guidance, resources, and academic expertise. Public-private partners also play meaningful roles by contributing resources, services, and time to support schools and families.

While schools and partners offer critical support, parents ultimately hold the primary responsibility for their child's education. Strong family engagement acknowledges this responsibility and supports parents in fulfilling it with confidence and clarity.

These recommendations focus on ensuring that family engagement is meaningful, accessible, and responsive to family needs.

- A. Leverage existing advisory councils or consider developing a parent advisory council to integrate family perspectives into local planning and governance at the school and district levels.
- B. Engage with existing parent organizations such as PTA and PTO to elevate parent voice beyond just fundraising.
- C. Explore new mechanisms for collecting family feedback across student groups and grade levels.
- D. Ensure all family engagement practices consider accessibility for families of students with disabilities.
- E. Engage special education advocates and families in the design of resources, communication practices, and support systems.
- F. Provide tailored support for navigating IEPs and special education services.
- G. Develop and share a toolkit to support the effective operation of local special education advisory councils, aligned with best practices and informed by the state Special Education Advisory Panel and parent input.

Supporting Focus Area 1: Partnerships and Collaboration

These recommendations seek to expand and strengthen partnerships between schools, families, communities, and the private sector.

- A. Support the development of a statewide repository of businesses and organizations interested in partnering with schools and encouraging two-way communication.
- B. Encourage two-way collaboration between schools seeking support and community partners seeking to engage.
- C. Collaborate with business associations to expand outreach and visibility of opportunities to support schools.

Supporting Focus Area 2: Communication, Clarity, and Access

These recommendations focus on ensuring that state, system, and school information and support are understandable, accessible, and responsive to the needs of families.

- A. Help families understand “who to go to for help” at the school, district, and state levels.
- B. Create resources and communication structures, including for early childhood, for ease of family access and navigation that promote family engagement campaigns aligned with key academic priorities such as literacy, math, and attendance.
- C. Provide resources that are more accessible for families, including digital and non-digital formats for families without broadband access and translation of communication and materials into languages other than English.
- D. Develop a parent-facing toolkit aligned with student milestones by age or grade level and including clear guidance on high school options including IGP meetings, dual enrollment, graduation pathways, course choice, and graduation planning.
- E. Encourage school systems to offer in-person and virtual family engagement nights focused on high school and post-secondary planning.
- F. Use multiple outreach methods such as in-person, digital, print, and social media.

Supporting Focus Area 3: Support and Capacity Building

These recommendations address the need to equip educators and families with tools and knowledge to engage effectively.

- A. Develop a set of plug-and-play tools that systems can adopt or customize.
- B. Provide family engagement professional learning for educators, including how to connect with difficult-to-reach families.
- C. Provide family engagement professional learning for principals.
- D. Promote models of success through statewide platforms and professional networks.
- E. Include family engagement best practices in teacher preparation programs.
- F. Offer training and guidance for frontline school staff on engaging with families, including strategies for effective communication, identifying appropriate personnel to assist with various concerns, and connecting families with available services and programs.

Supporting Focus Area 4: Financial and Policy Alignment

These recommendations seek to sustain and expand family engagement efforts by addressing policy and funding considerations.

- A. Examine how state and federal funding can support expanded family engagement.
- B. Consider family engagement in conversations regarding school choice and broader initiatives.
- C. Support school system awareness and implementation of state laws and policies related to parent and family engagement, particularly those connected to access to educational opportunities for students and safeguards against issues such as truancy and chronic absenteeism.
- D. Encourage lawmakers to explore ways to include allocations for statewide informational communications to families when proposing priority education legislation.

The collaboration and expertise of the Parent and Family Engagement Task Force highlighted emerging areas of successful engagement and offered recommendations to further expand and strengthen this crucial aspect of education. The recommendations contained in this report focus on facilitating strategies, professional learning, and communication methods to provide a two-way network of support. The engagement of families, stakeholders, schools, and communities fosters citizenship, academic excellence, and true partnerships.

The resolution urged the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) to submit a written report to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and the House Committee on Education by December 31, 2025.

Relevant Data

Louisiana Department of Education

The Louisiana Department of Education does not collect or maintain statewide data on the identity or involvement of a student's parent or guardian, including fathers. While local school systems may collect such information during enrollment, it is not uniformly gathered or reported to the state. Privacy laws also restrict the Department from receiving personally identifiable information on students.



Louisiana Department of Health

Louisiana Department of Health

Fatherhood Engagement Initiatives

Introduction

Senate Concurrent Resolution 9 ([SCR9](#)) of the 2025 Regular Legislative Session of the Louisiana Legislature established the Louisiana Task Force on Fatherhood Engagement. The overall charge of the Task Force is to “study how Louisiana can increase the engagement of fathers in the lives of their children, to research best practices, and develop recommendations for each state agency to promote the full inclusion of fathers and the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children.”

The specific charge of the Task Force is to:

- Research state and national best practices on increasing fatherhood engagement in the lives of their children;
- Research and develop plans for how each state agency can promote the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children;
- Review existing state policies to identify policies that impede the development or implementation of greater fatherhood involvement measures or that will enhance the prospect of success of those measures; and
- Identify additional sources of funding, including non-governmental sources, to support programs that directly support fathers and responsible fatherhood.

Bureau of Family Health

The Louisiana Department of Health, Office of Public Health, Bureau of Family Health works to promote the health of Louisiana families throughout their lifetime. The Bureau oversees programs and initiatives to improve the health of pregnant women, babies, children, teens, adults, and children and youth with special healthcare needs.

The Bureau of Family Health's vision is for Louisiana to be a state where all people are valued to reach their full potential, from birth through the next generation. The Bureau's mission is to elevate the strengths and voices of individuals, families, and communities to catalyze transformational change to improve population health.

The Bureau of Family Health was designated to serve as the Louisiana Department of Health representative on the Louisiana Task Force for Fatherhood Engagement.

Objective

Aligned with the specific charge of the Louisiana Task Force for Fatherhood Engagement, Task Force members representing state departments were asked to assess current and past efforts, future opportunities, and challenges of engaging fathers and promoting their involvement in the lives of their children. The objective of this report is to summarize ongoing initiatives, opportunities, and challenges affecting the Louisiana Department of Health's efforts to promote fatherhood engagement in the lives of children and families.

Section 1: Preparation of the Report

The first meeting of the Louisiana Task Force on Fatherhood Engagement was organized on August 27, 2025. Within its initial meeting, each participating state department was requested to prepare a report for the Task Force. Additional guidance outlining the desired contents of the report was received on September 12, 2025.¹²²

Based on the guidance provided by the Louisiana Task Force on Fatherhood Engagement, a survey was created to gather information from offices across the Louisiana Department of Health. A definition for "fatherhood engagement" was not provided by the Task Force. For the purposes of the Department survey, respondents were prompted to identify father engagement as "the purposeful inclusion of fathers

in programs, services, and activities with the objective of improving outcomes for fathers, children, and families.”¹²³

The survey was shared with selected Louisiana Department of Health Offices on September 22, 2025, and responses were received through October 3, 2025. Offices responding to the survey included:

- Office of Public Health;
- Office of Behavioral Health;
- Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities;
- Office of Women’s Health and Community Health;
- Office of Management and Finance, Bureau of Health Services Financing/Medicaid; and
- Office of the Secretary, Bureau of Media and Communications.

Section 2: Louisiana Department of Health’s Current and Past Fatherhood Engagement Initiatives

This section of the report describes the Louisiana Department of Health’s current and past (spanning the last five years) efforts to promote fatherhood engagement in the lives of the children and families.

Data Related to Fathers’ Engagement in the Lives of Their Children

This section of the report presents an overview of data collected by the various offices of the Louisiana Department of Health, which may be relevant to the issue of fatherhood engagement in the lives of their children and family.

Bureau of Vital Records and Statistics

The [Bureau of Vital Records and Statistics](#) consists of official state records of birth and death, including fetal death. These records are essential for the administration of the laws governing our Bureau and for the protection of individual rights. In addition, the statistical data from these records are of great value to public health and other agencies.

The [National Vital Statistics System](#) includes birth certificate data, which consists of data about paternity (whether or not paternity is listed), the age, race, and education of the father, marital status of the father, etc. In 2020, a [paternal trends data brief](#)¹²⁴ was created using 2013-2018 birth certificate data. The brief describes the demographics of Louisiana paternal trends.

Key findings of the 2020 data brief:

- Forty-six point five percent (46.5%) of babies were born to unmarried mothers.
- Fifteen percent (15%) of birth certificates did not include paternal information or acknowledgment of paternity.
- Fifty-two percent (52%) of teenage fathers were non-Hispanic Black.

Requests for data from the national vital statistics system can be submitted using the Louisiana Department of Health's [online data request form](#).

Office of Public Health, Bureau of Family Health

The [Bureau of Family Health](#) administers the state's Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant program, the Title X Family Planning program, and many other initiatives designed to improve the health of men and women of reproductive age, pregnant women, and families, including children and youth with special healthcare needs.

Within its mission to contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of Louisiana's child and adolescent population, the Bureau of Family Health oversees several public health surveys and data analysis initiatives to support understanding of child and adolescent health needs in the state. The [National Survey of Children's Health](#) is funded and directed by the Health Resources and Services Administration Maternal and Child Health Bureau. The National Survey of Children's Health provides rich data on multiple statistics, intersecting aspects of children's lives—including physical and mental health, access to and quality of healthcare, and the child's family, neighborhood, school, and social context.

Importantly, the National Survey of Children's Health asks respondents about the family structure children live in. The response options include:

- Two parents, currently married;
- Two parents, not currently married;
- Single parent (mother);
- Single parent (father);
- Grandparent household; and
- Other family type.

National Survey of Children's Health data, which is received annually and held by the Bureau of Family Health, allows for analyses of differences between children being raised in different family structures. The National Survey of Children's Health includes many data points related to children's general health, mental health, school participation, housing, food security, etc.¹²⁵ The Bureau of Family Health has invested funding

to increase the number of households included in the annual survey, which contributes to improved data accuracy. Analysis of several key indicators related to children's family structure can be found in Annex 3.¹²⁶

The National Survey of Children's Health [interactive data inquiry system](#) is accessible to the public. For more information or for support using this inquiry system, interested parties may contact the Louisiana Title V Program at TitleVMCH@la.gov. Data requests may also be submitted to the Bureau of Family Health [Data Center](#).

Specific Programs and Services Supporting Fathers

This section of the report presents an overview of the programs and services overseen by the various offices of the Louisiana Department of Health, which have specific relevance to promoting fatherhood engagement in the lives of their children and families.

Bureau of Vital Records and Statistics

The Bureau of Vital Records and Statistics registers and maintains [Acknowledgments of Paternity](#) completed in hospital at time of birth and after. This service allows fathers to add themselves to their child's birth certificate.

The Bureau of Vital Records and Statistics is also the central repository for the [Putative Father Registry](#). The Registry allows a man who believes he may be the biological father of a child to register his claim of paternity. This registration preserves his right to receive notice of any adoption proceedings involving the child. To be effective, the claim must be filed before the child's birth or within 15 days after. Failure to register may result in the loss of the right to contest an adoption.

Office of Behavioral Health

The [Office of Behavioral Health](#) manages and delivers the services and supports necessary to improve the quality of life for citizens with mental illness and addictive disorders. The Office acts as monitors and subject matter consultants for the children's Coordinated System of Care program and the Medicaid Healthy Louisiana managed care plans, which manage behavioral health services. The Office also delivers direct care through hospitalization and has oversight of behavioral health community-based treatment programs by way of the human services districts and authorities. Services are provided for Medicaid and non-Medicaid eligible populations.

Implemented by the Louisiana Mental Health Association, the Office of Behavioral Health's [Parent Support Network](#) provides support to parents and caregivers of children experiencing mental health challenges. This program does not focus on fathers only, but fathers of children with mental health challenges are also eligible for participation.

The Office of Behavioral Health's [Coordinated System of Care](#) works to provide a coordinated network of services and supports for children and youth with behavioral health challenges and their families. The Office of Behavioral Health works with Medicaid, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Education, the Office of Juvenile Justice, the Governor's Office, and family, youth and advocate representatives to establish a service delivery system that is better integrated and achieves improved outcomes.

The Office of Behavioral Health's Youth [Crisis System](#) requires recognized family peer support specialists to be part of the treatment and recovery team. They are trained peer support specialists with personal lived experience as a parent or primary caregiver of a youth with behavioral health conditions who has successfully navigated the behavioral health services system.

While these programs do not specifically target engagement of fathers, they support and encourage engagement of the entire family/support system when serving and supporting youth.

Office of Public Health, Bureau of Family Health

Recognizing the importance of engaging fathers in maternal and child health programs and services, the Bureau of Family Health established a fatherhood engagement work group in 2017. The work group included staff from the Bureau's communications team and key maternal and child health programs. Activities led by the work group are highlighted below.

Promoting Effective Engagement of Black Fathers in Early Childhood Development Programs

In 2018, the Bureau of Family Health collaborated with [MEE \(Motivational Educational Entertainment\) Productions Inc.](#) to conduct a study that aimed to collect insights into how state agencies, like the Bureau of Family Health, can engage Black fathers to support the health and wellness of their families, particularly of their female partners and children. MEE Productions conducted qualitative, focus group research with Black fathers in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Shreveport. The [phase one report](#)¹²⁷ provided key findings and general recommendations on how state agencies can improve efforts to engage Black fathers.

Following the completion of the initial study, MEE Productions conducted follow-up focus group discussions to test key messages and health education materials used to promote various health programs and services. They also gathered feedback on how the messaging and materials could be enhanced to better connect with Black fathers. The [phase two report](#)¹²⁸ provided feedback on which messages and materials were viewed to be most effective by the focus group participants as well as sharing recommendations for improvement. The report also recommended routine community testing of health education messages and materials.

Lastly, MEE Productions collaborated with three specific programs to develop recommendations to improve engagement with Black fathers. Recommendations were provided to the following Bureau of Family Health programs:

1. The Louisiana Perinatal Quality Collaborative Gift Initiative, which promotes healthy infant feeding practices;
2. The Louisiana Developmental Screening Initiative, which promotes routine well-child visits for children ages zero through three; and
3. The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, which provides home-visitation and support services for eligible families across the state.

Program enhancement goals were defined for each of the three programs. Enhancement goals focused on improving communication strategies to engage fathers, engaging fathers in program advisory groups, and educating health system stakeholders about the importance of including fathers in children's health service provision. Program enhancements were integrated into each of the programs. No specific assessment has been done to measure the impact of these enhancements.

Literature Review: Understanding the Benefits of an Engaged Father to the Family Unit

In 2021, the Bureau of Family Health conducted a literature review of scholarly articles related to fatherhood engagement. The review was used to produce a [report¹²⁹](#) summarizing how the following themes are addressed in the academic literature:

- Historical and biological perspectives on the importance of fatherhood;
- Benefits of fatherhood engagement – for the mother, father, and child;
- Fathers' perspectives on fatherhood engagement; and
- State and national good practices for fatherhood engagement.

The final recommendations of the review encouraged the Bureau of Family Health to invest in community-based programs run by fathers for fathers, and educate and support health service providers to engage fathers without bias.

The Bureau of Family Health fatherhood engagement work group was phased out in 2022 due to turnover of multiple key members and changes of priorities within the Bureau.

Office of Women's Health and Community Health

The Office on Women's Health and Community Health oversees the implementation of the [Talk, Listen, and Care \(TLC\) Moms](#) initiative. Established in June 2022, the initiative provides resources and support for those experiencing depression or anxiety related to pregnancy or a recent birth. Talk, Listen, and Care Moms supports expectant mothers and those caring for newborns.

Fathers/caregivers are a target audience of the initiative, which informs fathers about maternal mental health and how they (fathers) can support mothers during and after pregnancy. Fathers are also educated about the management of their own mental health and informed about resources and supports available to assist them with feelings of depression or anxiety.

Efforts to Enact Policies that Support Fathers and Promote Their Involvement in the Lives of Their Children

No specific initiatives were reported by any Louisiana Department of Health offices or programs.

Efforts to Dedicate Resources, Including Funding, Focused on Engaging Fathers and Promoting Their Involvement in the Lives of Their Children

No specific initiatives were reported by any Louisiana Department of Health offices or programs.

Partnership with Organizations that Provide Direct Resources and Support to Fathers

The Bureau of Family Health partners with a variety of community-based organizations that provide supports to parents, including fathers. These community-based partners include:

- Ten Families Helping Families network member organizations;
- Five sickle cell foundations;
- One organization for parents of children who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing; and
- Multiple doula networks and organizations.

Efforts to Ensure Fathers are Represented in Key Staff, Advisory, Leadership, and Decision-Making Roles Throughout the Agency

The Louisiana Department of Health is an equal opportunity employer that does not intentionally recruit staff, advisory members, or leadership based on gender or paternity. Offices of the Department are committed to non-discrimination in all hiring, appointments, or decision-making processes.

Fathers and men are welcome to participate and contribute in our work.

Efforts to Include, Recognize, and Promote Programming and Resources for Fathers in Your Communications Materials

No specific initiatives were reported by any Louisiana Department of Health offices or programs.

Section 3: Barriers and Challenges

No specific initiatives were reported by any Louisiana Department of Health offices or programs.

Section 4: Opportunities for Future Work

This section of the report describes opportunities identified by Louisiana Department of Health staff from different offices to promote fatherhood engagement in the lives of their children and families.

The Bureau of Vital Records and Statistics

The Bureau of Vital Records and Statistics recognizes the importance of ensuring that fathers are aware of the Putative Father Registry as a resource. The Bureau is committed to doing more to promote this registry to support fathers in protecting their parental rights. It is also considering the following website enhancements to make information and services more accessible to fathers:

- **Webpage updates:** Create a clear, easy-to-navigate page explaining the registry, its purpose, and how to register.
- **Frequently Asked Questions Section:** Address common questions in plain language.
- **Online Registration:** If not already available, offer secure online submission of the acknowledgment form.
- **Multilingual Access:** Provide information in multiple languages to increase access.

The Bureau of Vital Records and Statistics plans to continue providing training and education to hospitals and birthing clerks to promote the active involvement of fathers in the lives of their children by encouraging early legal recognition of paternity and supporting fathers through education, access, and engagement beginning at birth.

The Office of Behavioral Health

The Office of Behavioral Health is in the process of launching the statewide Early Childhood Supports and Services program. By January 2026, the program will be implemented statewide to provide supports and services to children age zero to five years and their families/support systems. While there are currently no plans to specifically target fathers, the program will provide support and encourage engagement of the entire family/support system when serving youth.

Office of Public Health, Bureau of Family Health

The Bureau of Family Health is funded in part by the federal [Title V Maternal and Child Health \(MCH\) Block Grant](#). The 2026-2030 state action plan for Title V funding identifies meaningful participation of family and community leaders in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of maternal and child health policies and services as a priority need. In response to this priority need, the Bureau supports representatives of community-based organizations and persons with relevant lived expertise to participate in state boards, councils, and commissions relative to maternal and child health policymaking and services in the state. Community and family leaders are also supported to participate in advisory groups for specific programs and services supported by the Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant. Community-based organizations or individuals interested in participating in a Title V supported board, council, commission, or advisory group may contact TitleVMCH@la.gov for additional information.

Bureau of Health Financing/Medicaid

The Bureau of Health Financing, which oversees Medicaid services, formed its first [Beneficiary Advisory Council](#) in 2025. The Beneficiary Advisory Council is a dedicated forum for individuals with lived experience in the Medicaid program to help shape Medicaid policy and program development. Several parents, including fathers, of current Medicaid beneficiaries were selected as members of the Council. Topics the Council will consider and provide insights on to the Medicaid agency may include:

- Additions and changes to covered services;
- Coordination of care;
- Quality of services;
- Eligibility, enrollment, and renewal processes;
- Enrollee and provider communications;
- Access to services;
- Cultural competency and language access; and
- Other issues impacting health/medical services.

LouisianaWorks



LOUISIANA**WORKS**

LOUISIANA TASKFORCE ON FATHERHOOD ENGAGEMENT

BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES THROUGH WORK

November 2025

OUR MISSION IS TO BE THE STATE'S COMPREHENSIVE WORKFORCE SOLUTION THAT TRANSFORMS LIVES BY CONNECTING PEOPLE TO MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND EMPOWERING BUSINESSES WITH SKILLED TALENT.

WE BUILD SKILLS AND FIND WORK

- Job search tools and individualized help connecting with employers.
- Training and education programs to gain new skills or credentials.
- Paid work opportunities and career exploration for young people.
- Support for students and recent graduates to start strong in the workforce.
- Help for people returning to the workforce after incarceration.
- Work-based learning through apprenticeship opportunities.
- Retraining and support for workers who lose jobs due to overseas competition.
- Career counseling, priority services, and placement for veterans.
- Specialized employment support for people with disabilities.



LAWORKS.NET

WHY FATHERHOOD MATTERS IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT?

WORK □ STABILITY □ FAMILY STRENGTH

- Steady work supports emotional and financial presence
- Economic stability fuels positive father–child relationships
- Workforce services can be a bridge to family strength
- When fathers thrive at work, children thrive at home

DATA SNAPSHOT: FATHER'S SERVED THROUGH WORKFORCE PROGRAMS

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA):

- 109 single fathers enrolled in workforce services
- 97 received training services, with 78 participating in multiple services
- Services include job placement, career counseling, training and support services

Wagner Peyser Employment Services

- 372 single fathers enrolled in workforce services
- 108 received individual career services, 59 completed training



ONE AGENCY, MANY SOLUTIONS

HELP FOR EMPLOYERS

- Provides a central hub for business workforce solutions.
- Assistance finding and hiring qualified workers.
- Customized training for new or existing employees, including support for small businesses.
- Tax credits and incentives for hiring individuals facing barriers to work.
- Resources and planning when layoffs or closures affect your workforce.
- Guidance on hiring foreign workers when needed.

GET SUPPORT WHILE YOU'RE BETWEEN JOBS

- Temporary income to help cover essentials while you look for work.
- Guidance on filing for unemployment and understanding employer responsibilities.
- Personalized coaching to get back to work faster.

SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

- Short-term financial help for families with children while building long-term stability.
- Extra training and job support for people receiving food assistance.
- Local services that connect people with food, housing, and emergency help.





CURRENT FATHERHOOD FOCUSED EFFORTS

WHILE NOT DESIGNED EXCLUSIVELY FOR FATHERS, LOUISIANA WORKS PROGRAMS SERVE MANY FATHERS BY ADDRESSING KEY BARRIERS:

- Delivered in person and virtually across Louisiana
- Services help remove employment barriers for custodial & non-custodial fathers: supportive services include transportation, child care, housing, tools
- Referrals to financial literacy and parenting resources
- Case managers counsel fathers toward self-sufficiency
- Employment becomes a path to presence and participation

COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES (CAA) & FATHERHOOD PROGRAMMING

- Only 5/42 CAAs offer fatherhood initiatives:
 - St. Mary CAA – active program in Head Start centers
 - Caddo CAA – father-led activities in early learning settings
 - Calcasieu Parish Police Jury – relaunching “DADs” program
 - Total Community Action – partnered with Fatherhood Network of LA
 - Cameron CAA – new program launching 2025



WHAT IS WORKING & WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?



Working Well:

- Integrated American Job Center model simplifies access for fathers by providing training and support in one place
- Partnerships increase reach and trust, like those with community agencies to create early engagement
- Coaching builds confidence and retention by helping fathers overcome barriers



Needs Improvement:

- Dedicated funding for family-centered approaches due to some federal funding restricting targeted program funding
- Consistent statewide framework for father engagement
- Better data to measure impact and outcomes related to fatherhood engagement
- Barriers noted are hard to reach out-of-school youth who are fathers, insufficient cross-program coordination, cultural stigma and lack of visibility for fathers



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LOUISIANAWORKS

Our commitment to the families of Louisiana

LOUISIANA WORKS CAN EXPAND FATHERHOOD ENGAGEMENT

Together We Will:

- Link workforce and family support programs more tightly
- Engage employers on family-friendly policies
- Spotlight success stories that change the narrative
- Build Father-Focused Programs: Identify new ways to integrate father centered support into existing services.

Our Goals Moving Forward:

- Develop internal guidance to include fathers in outreach
- Launch “Fatherhood in Action” public campaign
- Provide staff training on father-engagement techniques to engage effectively
- Pursue federal and private funding for pilot projects



LOOKING FORWARD

EXPANDING SUPPORT

LAWWORKS.NET



THANK YOU

Fiona James, Chief of Staff

1001 North 23rd St., Baton Rouge, LA 70802
LAWWORKS.NET

Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections Services

Department of Public Safety & Corrections - Corrections Services State of Louisiana

JEFF LANDRY
Governor



GARY E. WESTCOTT
Secretary

October 24, 2025

Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections (DPS&C)

Report on Current Efforts to Engage and Support Fathers Involved in the Criminal Justice System

Submitted to: Fatherhood Engagement Task Force

I. Overview of the DPS&C

The DPS&C is committed to public safety and providing opportunities for positive behavioral change for individuals remanded to its custody or supervision. The DPS&C operates eight state correctional facilities, oversees individuals sentenced to state custody in local jails, manages Transitional Work Programs, and supervises approximately 50,000 individuals under Probation and Parole (P&P).

Vision

To create a safer Louisiana through secure operations, rehabilitative programming, and reentry preparation that strengthens families and communities. Our goal is to promote positive parenting techniques that strengthen the parent-child bond, increase safety of staff, inmates, citizens and law enforcement, while decreasing recidivism and violent crime.

Mission

Provide safe incarceration, effective community supervision, and evidence-based programming to inmates that support successful reintegration into their communities and reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

Core Priorities

- Staff and Inmate Safety;
- Provision of Basic Services;
- Opportunity for Change;
- Opportunity for Accountability and Restitution; and
- Reentry and Community Reintegration.

II. Population Overview (Current Estimates)

Category	Population
State Correctional Facilities	14,589
Individuals in Local Jails (State Sentenced)	15,450
Transitional Work Program Participation	1,730
Population under Probation & Parole Supervision	50,244

A significant portion of these individuals are fathers. The DPS&C recognizes that maintaining healthy family relationships is a key factor in reducing recidivism and improving child well-being outcomes.

III. Data Related to Father Engagement

- A majority of incarcerated men in Louisiana self-identify as fathers.
- National statistics indicate children of incarcerated parents are more likely to experience:
 - Behavioral challenges;
 - Academic struggles; and
 - Increased risk of future justice involvement.

The DPS&C does not currently require a standardized statewide fatherhood status indicator at intake; however, individual program participation data and facility-based surveys show:

- Malachi Dads participation: Thousands of incarcerated fathers have engaged in the program since inception.
- Parenting and family relationship courses are among the most frequently requested rehabilitative programs.

A statewide effort is currently underway to improve data collection and tracking of parental status, communication frequency, visitation access, and program outcomes.

IV. Current and Past Father-Focused Initiatives (Last 5 Years)

A. Programs Supporting Fathers

Malachi Dads (Louisiana State Penitentiary and Expanded Sites)

A peer-led fatherhood transformation program that teaches responsible fatherhood, emotional growth, communication, accountability, and legacy building. Participants commit to monthly written communication with their children.

Returning Hearts Celebration

A one-day reunification event at Angola that allows fathers to spend a full day with their children in a safe, structured environment designed to rebuild trust and heal family bonds.

Father-Daughter Dance (New Initiative – Louisiana State Penitentiary)

Launching with support from God Behind Bars to help daughters experience milestone moments with their incarcerated fathers.

Parenting & Family Strengthening Programs across Facilities and Local Jails

Parenting Inside Out, Nurturing Parenting, and other Certified Treatment & Rehabilitative Programs.

B. Education and Reentry Programs Supporting Fathers

Education and job readiness programs help fathers return home with the stability necessary for family reunification. The DPS&C provides:

- Adult Basic Education / GED / High School Equivalency;
- Career and Technical Education (with stackable industry credentials);
- College degree programs (supported through Pell reinstatement); and
- Standardized Pre-Release Curriculum (financial literacy, employment readiness, communication skills).

Regional Reentry Programs and Transitional Work Programs further connect returning fathers with employment, housing support, identification documents, and community programming.

C. Communications and Support to Caregivers

The DPS&C created the Informational Handbook for Caregivers of Children with Incarcerated Parents to help caregivers maintain healthy relationships and provide emotional support to children.

<https://doc.louisiana.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FINAL-DRAFT-Informational-Handbook-for-Caregivers-of-Children-with-Parents-in-Prison-3-30-2021.pdf>

D. Partnerships

The DPS&C collaborates with the following:

- Lifeline Global Ministries;
- Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS);
- Daughters Beyond Incarceration;
- God Behind Bars; and
- Faith-based, community, and nonprofit organizations statewide.

V. Challenges and Barriers

- Limited facility capacity for child visitation and father-child events;
- Inconsistent programming availability across local jails;
- Transportation challenges for families traveling to rural facilities;
- Lack of standardized statewide data tracking on parental engagement; and
- Stigma and relationship trauma in some families requires trauma-informed approaches.

VI. Opportunities and Future Work

Expand support for fathers and their children

1. Establish a Statewide Fatherhood Engagement Strategy

- Appoint a Fatherhood Engagement Coordinator; and
- Form a Fatherhood Advisory Council that includes formerly incarcerated fathers, caregivers, and youth.

2. Expand Family Contact Access

- Increase virtual visitation access, especially for long-distance families; and
- Improve family-friendly visitation spaces.

3. Scale Fatherhood Programming Statewide

- Expand Malachi Dads and parenting curricula to all state facilities and regional reentry sites.

4. Strengthen Transitional Support for Fathers Returning Home

- Prioritize father-family reunification in reentry case planning; and
- Collaborate with community organizations for father support groups in Probation & Parole districts.

5. Improve Communication and Awareness

- Develop fatherhood resource guides for incarcerated individuals and caregivers; and
- Highlight fatherhood programming in DPS&C newsletters, orientation materials, and releases.

VII. Proposed Implementation Timeline

Timeframe	Action
0 - 6 Months	Appoint Fatherhood Engagement Coordinator, Launch Fatherhood Advisory Council, and begin fatherhood baseline study.
6 - 12 Months	Pilot expanded fatherhood programs at two facilities, expand virtual visitation, and launch communication and caregiver resource campaigns.
1-3 Years	Scale fatherhood programming to all facilities and transitional work release sites, and publish an annual statewide Fatherhood Engagement Report.

VIII. Conclusion

The Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections recognizes the critical role fathers play in the stability, health, and future success of their children and families. Strengthening these relationships will improve public safety, enhance reentry outcomes, reduce recidivism, and support stronger communities across Louisiana. The DPS&C is committed to expanding, improving, and sustaining fatherhood engagement initiatives in the years to come.

Louisiana Office of Head Start Collaboration

December 15, 2025

Our Agency's Current Work

1. Please share relevant data your agency has that is related to the engagement and inclusion of fathers in the lives of their children?

Head Start has served as the nation's early childhood laboratory with 60 years of providing comprehensive services to low in-come children and families. The Head Start enrollment process includes development of an individualized family partnership agreement that identifies strengths, needs, and goals related to the family outcomes in the Parent Family Community Engagement Framework (PCFE) <https://headstart.gov/school-readiness/article/parent-family-community-engagement-pf-ce-framework>

More recently (2018) the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has issued an information memorandum that emphasizes integrated approaches that Prioritize and Enhance Father Engagement. This memorandum highlights research findings that demonstrate the value of father involvement in the lives of children and families, and identifies promising practices to promote and sustain meaningful father engagement, regardless of a father's physical location or custodial participation. <https://headstart.gov/policy/im/acf-acf-im-18-01>

2. Please describe your agency's current and past (over the past five years) efforts to do each of the following:

a. Design and implement programs, services, and resources specifically to support fathers

The Head Start PFCE Framework is an organizational guide for collaboration among families, Head Start programs, and community service providers to promote positive, enduring outcomes for children and families. The Framework describes the program elements — program foundations and impact areas — in early learning programs that can work together to positively influence child and family outcomes. The Framework identifies cultural and linguistic responsiveness; and positive, goal-oriented relationships as important drivers for these outcomes.

Head Start programs need strong program elements that are coordinated to create lasting change for families and children. Together with program leadership and professional development, continuous learning and quality improvement is one of the program foundations that supports effective father engagement.

b. Enact policies that support fathers and promote their involvement in the lives of their children

Leadership strategies for creating a program wide culture of continuous improvement for father engagement programming include:

- **Involve fathers and father figures.** Do they help plan and make decisions about effective fatherhood programming and successful community partnerships?
- **Encourage curiosity.** Are leaders, staff, and fathers asking questions and thinking critically?
- Value reflection. Are time and space provided to review policies and practices and their impact on father engagement?
- **Develop trust.** Are staff and fathers comfortable discussing challenges and proposing solutions?
- **Invite feedback.** Are fathers engaged in using data to assess strategies and make improvements?
- Emphasize a systematic, integrated, and comprehensive approach. Are improvement efforts designed to connect program systems and services for fathers more effectively and break down silos?

c. Dedicate resources, including funding, focused on engaging fathers and promoting their involvement in the lives of their children

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the \$16.5 billion block grant program created in 1996, has to some degree changed that scenario. The third congressional finding of the law that enacted the TANF program states: "Promotion of responsible fatherhood...is integral to successful child rearing and the well-being of children" (Tollestrup, J.). We are encouraged that about half of all states use some TANF funds for responsible fatherhood activities and hope to see that expand across the country.

In 2006, OFA began providing \$75 million in demonstration grant funding for Responsible Fatherhood activities and currently funds 36 organizations across the country. These programs provide services that combine father-child involvement skills development services and activities to address participation barriers and the economic stability needs of their participants with healthy relationship education (romantic and interpersonal) to improve father engagement and strengthen co-parenting and overall child and family well-being. Additionally, OFA funds The *National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse*, which serves as a resource for responsible fatherhood information, designed to promote and encourage the appropriate involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. This free, easily accessible resource can help all ACF programs achieve our common goal to improve the overall well-being of the families we serve.

In 2017 OFA, OPRE, and the Children's Bureau developed a project to identify and synthesize information about existing resources and efforts to engage fathers and paternal relatives of children involved in the child welfare system, identify potential strategies to increase their engagement (including Responsible Fatherhood grant programs), and carry out a systematic, replicable process to implement and test those

strategies. The impetus for the project was a review of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) findings, which show a lack of engaging birth parents overall and particularly low engagement of birth fathers and paternal relatives. As this project develops, we will provide regular updates on progress and findings that we hope to benefit fathers, their families and children across family service programs. Together, these initiatives and resources can go a long way to help all ACF programs achieve our common goal of improving the overall well-being of the families we serve.

OFA strongly encourages all offices of public assistance to work intensively to reach, include, and empower fathers to be active contributors in the lives of their children.

d. Partner with organizations that provide direct resources and support to fathers

Early childhood programs partner with community organizations to support positive child and family outcomes. Community partners may include health and mental health providers, social service agencies, workforce development offices, banks and asset development programs, faith-based organizations, schools, libraries and museums, children's theaters, and others.

"Often, programs do not have the internal capacity to go deeper to help parents. This is why we partner. There is and always will be another community entity that can enhance our services delivery, regardless of how strong it is." – *Fatherhood coordinator*

Programs can build collaborations that benefit fathers in many ways. Staff can structure community partnerships by considering how to support:

- **Individual fathers.** Fathers set individual goals and plan action steps as part of the family partnership process. A father may want to apply his skills in a new way and the likely partner is a workforce development program. Another may be looking for housing for his family and a program may refer him to a housing services agency.
- **All or many fathers in the program.** Fathers want to be the best parents they can be. An Early Head Start program builds a partnership with a local hospital that is offering a parenting course for expectant fathers. Fathers enrolled in the program can participate in the course at no cost.
- **All or many fathers in the community.** Many community agencies offer meaningful activities to engage men of different ages and backgrounds in the community. Fathers have different interests and needs. Programs can work with early childhood councils and other community initiatives to identify ways to engage men of different ages and backgrounds.

e. Ensure fathers are represented in key staff, advisory, leadership, and decision-making roles throughout the agency

Ensure Hiring Practices Attract Male Staff

Review hiring policies and staffing patterns. Are there male teachers, family service professionals, and home visitors who can relate to fathers and who can model male caregiving? Are there male staff who help recruit families and engage them in program activities? Do male staff reflect the various ages, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and competencies of the fathers in the program?

Create a Fatherhood Team of Staff and Parents

Utilize the team to plan and manage father-specific programming, such as fathers' groups and father-child activities. Support their selection of a parenting curriculum that affirms the role of fathers in family and child well-being. Ensure all family structures are valued, including fathers who do not live with their child. Fathers can develop leadership skills when they serve on the team.

Define a Position for a Father Engagement Coordinator

Job responsibilities may include engaging directly with fathers as well as promoting staff competence to work with fathers. Bring on new staff for this specific role or include these responsibilities within an existing role. The position is usually part of the family services team and involves working across multi-disciplinary teams. Give priority to current or past fathers in the program who may have a unique perspective to bring to the staff position. Include qualifications that emphasize relationship-building skills. Develop a job description with input from the human resources team, managers, staff, and parents.

f. Include, recognize, and promote programming and resources for fathers in your communications materials

As a program leader, become familiar with [ACF-ACF-IM-18-01 Integrating Approaches that Prioritize and Enhance Father Engagement](#). The Information Memorandum (IM) strongly encourages all human service agencies, including Head Start programs, to work together across governments to jointly create an environment that prioritizes father engagement as a critical factor in strengthening families. It recommends adopting approaches to enhance paternal involvement in all family support and child welfare-related programs. The IM also describes father engagement in several federal programs.

Look for opportunities to develop and maintain effective partnerships with community leaders and organizations. Collaborate with all community partners to ensure effective planning and communication that results in positive outcomes for children and families. Programs can build partnerships that support individual fathers, all fathers, sub-groups of fathers in the program, or many fathers in the community. One of the most important connections program leaders can make is with the local school district. There

are many options for Head Start collaborations with receiving schools. Collaboration can result in joint professional development, sharing information about curricula, and family and child visits to the new school. Work closely with school leaders, including the superintendent and principals, to make transition plans. Engage the whole family in the child's move to kindergarten. Help them understand what the expectations are in kindergarten and what the setting is like. Support the role of parents and caregivers as their child's lifelong educational advocate.

3. What barriers and challenges are preventing further engagement of fathers in the lives of their children and in your work?

- Domestic Situations
- Residing in different states
- Transportation
- Financial Situations
- Courts
- State/federal policies
- Housing
- Criminal Records

Opportunities and Future Work

4. Please describe the opportunities for your agency to expand its support for fathers and promote their engagement in the lives of their children.

Father engagement is not a stand-alone program initiative, but a vital and integrated aspect of parent, family, and community engagement work. A system wide integration of multiple activities builds a comprehensive father-engagement approach. Among these activities are:

- Creating father-friendly environments that are welcoming and comfortable
- Forming fathers' groups that plan activities and build support networks
- Training staff to implement a parenting curriculum that develops the knowledge and skills of fathers
- Investing in professional development to strengthen staff skills and practices with fathers
- Including fathers in parent-teacher conferences and home visits
- Designing recruitment materials that appeal to fathers
- Collaborating with community partners to align and reinforce strategies that respond to fathers' strengths, interests, and needs

Effective engagement of fathers requires staff to demonstrate genuine curiosity and respect for the unique strengths, talents, cultures, goals, and circumstances of fathers. A trusting relationship is the foundation for this partnership. Successful partnerships can lead to positive, long-lasting outcomes for fathers, children, and families.

“Father Engagement reflects the strengths, needs, and interests of fathers; the skills and expertise of program staff; and the resources in the community. There is no “one size fits all” approach.” – *Fatherhood coordinator*

This series is designed for all Head Start staff who interact with fathers, from program leaders and managers to direct service staff, such as family service professionals, fatherhood coordinators, teachers, home visitors, health staff, and transportation providers. This series is also useful for parent leaders, community partners, and training and technical assistance specialists.

5. Please describe what your agency plans to do over the coming months and years to:

a. Design and implement programs, services, and resources specifically to support fathers

Using the PFCE Framework in Father Engagement: Positive, Goal-Oriented Relationships

In the PFCE Framework, the top arrow refers to relationships among staff, families, and fathers that promote positive engagement and progress toward goals. Respectful, trusting relationships can develop over time through interactions that focus on the individual's strengths. When staff and fathers have strong relationships, they share a commitment to set meaningful goals, develop strategies, assess progress, and celebrate success.

Goal-oriented relationships with fathers contribute to the well-being of families, fathers, and children. Different fathers set different goals, and any one father may have a variety of goals. For example, goals may focus on:

- Increasing the economic stability of the family by finishing high school or getting job training
- Improving health literacy
- Participating in a parenting course
- Developing leadership skills
- Spending more quality time with their child
- Improving their relationship with their child's mother or other co-parents

Goals like these can increase a father's confidence and success as a parent, family member, and member of the community. Program staff partner with fathers to help them establish goals and make progress toward achieving them.

Strengths-based relationships are grounded in the belief that all families can make progress toward their goals. When focusing on the strengths of fathers and valuing their experiences, beliefs, and perspectives, program staff can develop meaningful and authentic relationships with these fathers. Strengthening relationships between staff and fathers builds mutually respectful and effective partnerships that contribute to positive and lasting outcomes for fathers, families, and children.

b. Enact policies that support fathers and promote their involvement in the lives of their children

When the program makes the effort to connect with fathers, a partnership between the staff and the father is formed. This partnership is a powerful bond, and it's an opportunity to do amazing things and go amazing places with children. – Head Start father Program leaders can create an organizational culture that fosters strong relationships with fathers. Explore these leadership strategies:

- Create a program-wide environment that values fathers as individuals, honors their experiences, and appreciates the role they play in their child's life.
- Communicate that father engagement is a program priority. It's everyone's responsibility to welcome fathers and support them.
- Accept differences and believe that each father has strengths and the capacity for resilience.
- Focus on professional development that enhances the relationship-building skills and practices.
- Encourage staff to partner with all fathers, including nonresident fathers. Invite them to meetings and activities. Nonresident fathers are fathers who do not currently live with their child.
- Reinforce the concept of co-parenting when there is more than one parent involved in raising the child. Co-parents are partners in their child's well-being and school readiness. Include other co-parents in decisions about the child.
- Help staff understand that self-awareness is essential for being open to building relationships with fathers.
- Promote respectful, responsive relationships among all staff, volunteers, and consultants.
- Ensure that fathers have opportunities to take on leadership roles, including on Policy Councils and in continuous program improvement efforts.

c. Dedicate resources, including funding, to engaging fathers and promoting their involvement in the lives of their children.

HHS Children's Bureau

Effectively engaging fathers is critical to achieving the Children's Bureau's (CB) vision of strengthening families, preventing maltreatment and the unnecessary removal of children from their homes, and promoting the safety, permanency and well-being of children. Engaging fathers prior to formal child welfare agency involvement, in a preventative fashion, is an area that child welfare agencies are beginning to recognize

as important. Agencies may use Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) program funding to support prevention programs that include father engagement.

HHS Family and Youth Services Bureau

The Family and Youth Bureau (FYSB) works to address a number of issues that impact or are related to father engagement. FYSB's mission is to support the organizations and communities that work every day to put an end to youth homelessness, adolescent pregnancy and domestic violence. FYSB achieves this by administering grants to programs that provide shelter, community services and prevention education for youth, adults and families.

HHS Office of Child Care

Child care serves as a critical resource in strengthening the role fathers play in the lives of their children. Nurturing relationships between fathers and their families contribute to positive cognitive and social developmental outcomes among children. Early care and learning providers in both home- and center-based settings are uniquely positioned to facilitate and promote fatherhood engagement initiatives. For families where both parents do not live in the same household, child care settings are an important resource to help families communicate about their children's growth and learning, and develop their parenting skills.

HHS Office of Child Support Enforcement

The child support program is the largest public program with a primary focus on fathers and their role in creating family well-being and economic self-sufficiency. The child support enforcement program works with fathers from the time their children are born until their children reach the age of majority. By engaging with fathers from the beginning, the child support program protects the legal connection fathers have with their children and supports lifelong emotional and financial support. The child support program is focused on more than just financial support, with expanded efforts to support fathers' engagement in the lives of their children through shared employment services and parenting programs.

HHS Office of Family Assistance

The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) has long recognized the value of healthy father involvement and the positive father-child relationship. According to a recent congressional report, low-income noncustodial parents historically have had little opportunity to participate in public assistance programs. Most of the policy discussion about low-income children that occurred during the "welfare reform" debates between the 1960s and 1990s was focused on single custodial mothers and their children, not on the fathers of those children.

HHS Office of Head Start

OHS has a long history of engaging male family members and father figures as important contributors to the school readiness of children and to the well-being of families and communities. ACF encourages Head Start and Early Head Start programs to continue to engage fathers as advocates and lifelong educators of their children in ways that meet the different needs of their individual families and communities.

HHS Office of Regional Operations

The Office of Regional Operations (ORO) has a long history of promoting ACF programs and policies and collaborating with public and private partners, including on the issue of father engagement, through the Immediate Office of the Regional Administrator and ACF's 10 Regional Offices, ORO conducts father engagement activities across the regions.

d. Partner with organizations that provide direct resources and support to fathers

- DCFS
- HHS
- OHS
- ACF
- Louisiana Works

e. Ensure fathers are represented in key staff, advisory, leadership, and decision-making roles throughout the agency

- State Agency Male assessment
- Leadership Boards
- Policy Councils
- Child Care Association
- Head Start Association
- EarlySteps
- Workforce Development

f. Include, recognize, and promote programming and resources for fathers in your communications materials

Please outline any specific relevant strategies or plans that have been or are being developed to advance these efforts.

- Use the Fatherhood Task Force Survey to develop a strategic engagement plan for fathers
- Reconvene with like-minded organizations to achieve objectives
- Involve Head Start Programs in the development and implementation of strategies

- Provide training through early childhood organizations (LHSA, LACAP, CCAL, LDOE & FINS)
- Solicit sponsors and supporters for ongoing sustainability
- Work with state agencies, governor's office, and state legislature to develop policy, statues & laws to support prioritizing and enhancing Father Engagement in the state.

Supreme Court of Louisiana

SUPREME COURT OF LOUISIANA



**REPORT OF THE
DRUG AND SPECIALTY COURT OFFICE**

To The

SCR 9 FATHERHOOD ENGAGEMENT TASKFORCE

November 10, 2025

The Louisiana Supreme Court Drug and Specialty Court Office (SCDSCO) is pleased to present on one of the types of specialty courts that currently exist in the state that focuses specifically on families. This presentation will give a general outline of specialty courts in Louisiana and the function of the Family Preservation Court.

In accordance with the Reporting Template for State Agencies required by the Fatherhood Engagement Taskforce, please see the following response:

Current Work

- 1. Please share relevant data your agency has that is related to the engagement and inclusion of fathers in the lives of their children?**

Though SCDSCO does not have any program that has been implemented solely to support fathers, our programs provide access to treatment for substance use and mental health issues. We have therefore also not previously tracked data related only to fathers. Our clients, though, include fathers and potential fathers struggling with substance use and mental health issues who are involved in the justice system. One of the things that specialty courts do is reduce recidivism, which directly impacts the jail and prison population. According to Dr. Ghandnoosh in The Sentencing Project, most parents in prison are fathers (626,800 fathers compared to 57,700 mothers).

2. Please describe your agency's current and past (over the past five years) efforts to do each of the following:

a. Design and implement programs, services, and resources specifically to support fathers

The specialty court programs have been utilizing treatment resources and applying best practices for over 20 years in many jurisdictions. These programs also facilitate ancillary mental health treatment and have incorporated various tools related to parenting, anger management, budgeting, building healthy relationships and engaging in prosocial activities. Nonviolent fathers involved in the criminal justice system who are accepted in a specialty court are directly supported by the provision of treatment for substance use disorder and cooccurring disorders.

b. Enact policies that support fathers and promote their involvement in the lives of their children

There was a time when drug courts were not well known in many locations; however, over the years there has been a significant increase in drug court awareness. Traditional drug courts typically combine treatment with case management and judicial intervention to help individuals who have been charged with certain criminal offences and are struggling with a substance use disorder. The success of this model has resulted in the development of other types of treatment courts in our state. These include DWI (Driving While Intoxicated/Impaired) Courts, Reentry Courts, Veteran's Courts, Juvenile Courts, Mental Health Courts, and Family Preservation Courts. Most of these programs, at a minimum, indirectly promote fathers' involvement in the lives of their children by allowing for their release and treatment. Whether fathers are physically absent due to incarceration or mentally absent due to drugs, alcohol or mental illness, specialty courts help to make them be more present by allowing for their release in a structured environment with increased accountability and access to treatment and medication for their disease. Apart from the indirect mechanisms of other specialty courts, Family Preservation Courts directly promote the parent's involvement in the lives of their children which of course can include a number of fathers. Family Preservation Courts (FPC's) are not as numerous as adult drug courts and are also fairly resource heavy. Moreover, unlike the other specialty court models, one doesn't become a participant based on any formal criminal charges. These individuals likewise struggle with substance use disorder however they are also the legal and primary caretakers of a child who has been placed, or is in danger of being placed, into DCFS care outside the parental home. Parents in FPCs are not trying to escape jail as a consequence of criminal charges. The primary motivation or initiation for change in a FPC is usually the children. In a recent study designed to evaluate effects associated with Family Treatment Court participation on child permanency and safety, they found that, when compared to non-participants, program participants were 81% more likely to reunify.

c. Dedicate resources, including funding, focused on engaging fathers and promoting their involvement in the lives of their children

Our funding for most of these specialty court programs is based in large part on funds that are appropriated by the legislature. The eight FPCs in the state are funded directly by our office but they as well as other specialty courts often seek additional support from other sources locally, statewide and sometimes on a federal level. Apart from those sources most programs charge fees for either ancillary program expenses or drug testing.

d. Partner with organizations that provide direct resources and support to fathers

Partnerships are essential for specialty courts to work. In most cases this includes the judiciary, the district attorney's office, defense counsel, the department of public safety, and treatment forming the team that meets frequently. The team involves key individuals who monitor and support the participant. Many programs also partner with various other entities such as churches, civic organizations, and benefactor groups to help get incentives, transportation aid, clothing and food to individuals during times of need. Case managers regularly assist with searching for, and/or aiding in, applications for employment. A number of programs have worked with Louisiana Rehabilitation Services with that end in mind. Some programs have even offered direct job readiness training for all active participants. In most programs participants are encouraged to obtain full time employment and/or educational pursuits. In the FPC setting DCFS is a crucial partner. It is likewise beneficial with FPCs to have partnerships with the local schools and the school board.

e. Ensure fathers are represented in key staff, advisory, leadership, and decision-making roles throughout the agency

Our office has no prohibition, requirement or recommendation regarding the gender or parental nature of key staff positions. Qualified individuals, which may include fathers, mothers and non-parents, are selected by each jurisdiction and each court has great discretion in the selection of these staff positions. The primary decision-making role is of course the judge, and they are subject to the general election. Our office has no rule that regulates or promotes fathers in any program's staff. Though no such regulation, prohibition, or recommendation exists, our office is aware that many fathers fill various roles on various teams throughout the state.

f. Include, recognize, and promote programming and resources for fathers in your communications materials

None of our communication materials recognizes or promotes resources specifically for fathers, however our FPCs are specifically geared towards families. Our pamphlets and materials also have been used to track drug-free births each year.

Family Preservation Courts are not focused specifically on just the mother or father of the child but on the goal of reunification and sobriety with sobriety being the primary focus. If the parent or legal guardian becomes sober and stable, this can ultimately provide a path towards reunification or in many cases at least allow for more involvement in the future.

3. What barriers and challenges are preventing further engagement of fathers in the lives of their children and in your work?

Barriers and challenges to engagement range from transportation issues to resource/treatment availability at times that allow for different employment times. Though many programs provide treatment during different times to accommodate different work schedules, not all types of jobs or schedules can be accommodated. Extended shift employment, for example multiple days offshore, is often not allowed.

Another barrier we see is sometimes a general unwillingness by the client to participate. This applies to everyone, but there is such a higher percentage of males than females that constitute the number of unwilling criminal defendants each year. The basis for this unwillingness is not always clear during screening, and sometimes it is not clear even after treatment has been underway. Many defendants often struggle with trust and transparency regarding anything concerning the legal system. This creates an obstacle that needs to be overcome at multiple points of engagement.

Future work

4. Please describe the opportunities for your agency to expand its support for fathers and promote their engagement in the lives of their children.
5. Please describe what your agency plans to do over the coming months and years to:
 - a. Design and implement programs, services, data, and resources specifically to support fathers
 - b. Enact policies that support fathers and promote their involvement in the lives of their children
 - c. Dedicate resources, including funding, to engaging fathers and promoting their involvement in the lives of their children
 - d. Partner with organizations that provide direct resources and support to fathers
 - e. Ensure fathers are represented in key staff, advisory, leadership, and decision-making roles throughout the agency
 - f. Include, recognize, and promote programming and resources for fathers in your communications materials

Our office intends to start a process of tracking the number of fathers and mothers receiving services and graduating from the different treatment court programs.

Apart from getting more data, our office intends to continue the process of working with different jurisdictions to foster continued or new programs in those communities. In addition, we intend to continue our partnership with different organizations and promote the same in individual jurisdictions to promote increased success. We intend to also continue to educate on best practices and provide resources and guidelines to help promote those best practices in treatment courts throughout the state. Given the relative success of FPCs, we have not identified any significant change that is warranted at this time involving funding, policies, partnerships, or team representation.

As it concerns continued barriers to engagement, whether male or female, this is an area we intend to keep examining. Engagement is not a one-way door so our programs must learn to identify new ways to actively engage with potential participants. Apart from the need to repeatedly re-engage from our end, we will continue to promote evidence-based training and treatment and provide a database for courts to input activity.

SUPREME COURT OF LOUISIANA



**REPORT OF THE
Division of Children and Families
of the Judicial Administrator's Office
of the Louisiana Supreme Court**

To The

SCR 9 FATHERHOOD ENGAGEMENT TASKFORCE

November 10, 2025

The Division of Children and Families in the Louisiana Supreme Court is pleased to report on the work of this division for the Fatherhood Engagement Task Force organized pursuant to SCR 9 (2025).

The Fatherhood Engagement Taskforce has requested the use of the Reporting Template for State Agencies. The Division of Children and Families in the Louisiana Supreme Court is not a state agency; it is a part of the Judiciary, a separate and distinct branch of government.

The division contains three programs of funding – CASA Assistance Program, FINS Assistance Program, and the Court Improvement Program. CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate, and the CASA Assistance Program is designed to provide funding to the non-profit organizations in the state that provide CASA volunteers to courts in *child in need of care* cases. FINS stands for Families In Need of Services, a legal process found in Title VII of the Louisiana Children's Code. Necessary for this process is a FINS Intake Officer in each court with juvenile jurisdiction. FINS Assistance Program provides funding to state courts to aid in ensuring that courts can carry out the FINS legal process with the necessary personnel and support. The Court Improvement Program is a federally funded program that supports each state's highest court to collaborate with the state child welfare agency. This program supports the legal system and the child welfare system through training stakeholders, improving data collection, and supporting the legal workforce through systems funding improvements.

This report will provide the best response possible to the template inquiry of the task force.

Data

Currently the Division of Children and Families in the Louisiana Supreme Court does not collect specific data related to the engagement and inclusion of fathers in the lives of their children. The CASA organizations funded by the division maintain their own databases of case related information. The FINS-AP database of informal *families in need of services* cases contains information about all relevant family members related to children referred to the court in those cases. The Court Improvement Program actively works with the Department of Children and Family Services, a state agency, to review their data, however, the Court Improvement Program is not the custodian of that data.

Current and Past Efforts

1. Please describe your agency's current and past (over the past five years) efforts to do each of the following:

- a. Design and implement programs, services, and resources specifically to support fathers

The Division of Children and Families in the Louisiana Supreme Court is not currently nor has it in the past five years designed and implemented programs, services and resources specifically to support fathers.

- b. Enact policies that support fathers and promote their involvement in the lives of their children

The division has not enacted policies that specifically support fathers and promote their involvement in the lives of their children. All policies in the division are meant to support the work in the field for families and children.

- c. Dedicate resources, including funding, focused on engaging fathers and promoting their involvement in the lives of their children

The division has not dedicated resources, including funding, focused on engaging fathers and promoting their involvement in the lives of their children. Funding in the division is used to support CASA Organizations in the state, Courts in the state to carry out the *families in need of services* legal process, and the Court Improvement Program (pursuant to the federal program instructions of that program).

Work in the Court Improvement Program has helped gain more draw-down federal funds (Title IV-E) for attorneys that represent parents in *child in need of care* cases, which helped ensure fathers had a voice and a representative in their cases. Additionally, it aided parent attorneys to find more fathers through appointments of *curator ad hocs* in those cases.

d. Partner with organizations that provide direct resources and support to fathers

The division has not partnered with organizations that provide direct resources and support to fathers.

e. Ensure fathers are represented in key staff, advisory, leadership, and decision-making roles throughout the agency

The division cannot ensure fathers are represented in key staff, advisory, leadership, and decision-making roles throughout the agency, because the Supreme Court is not an agency, and the division cannot control the Judiciary hiring process. The division is currently made up of two men (one of whom is a father), and four women (two of whom are mothers).

f. Include, recognize, and promote programming and resources for fathers in your communications materials

The division has not included, recognized, and promoted programming and resources for fathers in communications materials. Communications materials are aimed at being generic and inclusive of all the family.

Barriers and Challenges

Currently there is no evidence to support any barriers or challenges that are preventing engagement of fathers in the lives of their children in the programs managed by the Division of Children and Families. The programs and processes supported by the division are systems work. The systems supported by the funding helps Courts in child in need of care cases, families in need of services cases, and in the work of training and educating stakeholders. All work is aimed at the whole family, not just one part.

Opportunities and Future Work

Opportunities to expand support for fathers and promote their engagement in the lives of their children exist in the realm of training and documentation. The Division can work on analyzing data collected in the Families In Need of Services database of informal cases throughout the state to determine whether FINS Officers are capturing data related to fathers, as well as mothers or other caregivers.

Division policies can be examined to determine whether updates need to be made with regards to engaging fathers or other family members more specifically.

Training can be updated to encourage FINS Officers and other system stakeholders to engage at the local levels with organizations that support or provide resources to fathers.

Communications materials will be checked to ensure that all family members have representation.

Appendix

Template for State Agency Reports to the Louisiana Task Force on Fatherhood Engagement

SCR 9 Fatherhood Engagement Task Force Reporting Template for State Agencies

Please use the following questions to guide your presentation to the Fatherhood Engagement Task Force about your work related to engaging fathers.

Your Agency's Current Work

Please use the questions below to share information about your agency's current work related to the engagement of fathers and promoting the full inclusion of fathers in the lives of their children.

1. Please share relevant data your agency has that is related to the engagement and inclusion of fathers in the lives of their children?
2. Please describe your agency's current and past (over the past five years) efforts to do each of the following:
 - a. Design and implement programs, services, and resources specifically to support fathers
 - b. Enact policies that support fathers and promote their involvement in the lives of their children
 - c. Dedicate resources, including funding, focused on engaging fathers and promoting their involvement in the lives of their children
 - d. Partner with organizations that provide direct resources and support to fathers
 - e. Ensure fathers are represented in key staff, advisory, leadership, and decision-making roles throughout the agency
 - f. Include, recognize, and promote programming and resources for fathers in your communications materials

Please include specifics about what worked and could be improved as well as the impacts of these efforts to date.

3. What barriers and challenges are preventing further engagement of fathers in the lives of their children and in your work?

Opportunities and Future Work

4. Please describe the opportunities for your agency to expand its support for fathers and promote their engagement in the lives of their children.
5. Please describe what your agency plans to do over the coming months and years to:
 - a. Design and implement programs, services, data, and resources specifically to support fathers
 - b. Enact policies that support fathers and promote their involvement in the lives of their children
 - c. Dedicate resources, including funding, to engaging fathers and promoting their involvement in the lives of their children
 - d. Partner with organizations that provide direct resources and support to fathers
 - e. Ensure fathers are represented in key staff, advisory, leadership, and decision-making roles throughout the agency
 - f. Include, recognize, and promote programming and resources for fathers in your communications materials

Please outline any specific relevant strategies or plans that have been or are being developed to advance these efforts.

Existing Resources & Programs that Can Help Promote Fatherhood Engagement in Louisiana

*Organizations with an asterisk were identified as directly providing services, trainings, and resources specifically for fathers.

Public Health Region	Organization / Program	Description
1	City of New Orleans - Parent Leadership Training Institute	A cohort-based, civic leadership program that trains parents to advocate for children and families in public policy and local governance, and seeks to intentionally include fathers. Funding ended for this program in 2025.
1	*Crescent City Dads / Dad's Circle	A fatherhood program that gives dads tools and support to be more engaged parents. Dad's Circle is a peer support group where fathers talk, listen, and learn alongside other dads.
1	*Dad-A-Port	Provides structured fatherhood education and peer support to improve parenting skills and father-child relationships with a focus on perinatal and early childhood.
1	Daughters Beyond Incarceration	Supports girls ages 8–18 who have incarcerated parents through mentoring, mental health and wellness programming, youth advocacy, policy fellowships, and leadership development.
1	*Fathers Matter NOLA	A New Orleans-based fatherhood advocacy nonprofit led by fathers that provides a space for dads to chill, learn, and build, offering weekly sessions that engage fathers in conversations about what fatherhood is, what it could be, and what it isn't.
1	Fleet and Family Support Center	Provides military families with counseling, parenting support, deployment assistance, and family readiness services.
1	Healthy Start New Orleans	Focuses on maternal and child health by providing home visiting, care coordination, and father engagement to reduce infant mortality.
1	New Orleans Women and Children Shelter	Provides emergency shelter, advocacy, and supportive services for women and children experiencing domestic violence.
1	*NOLA Dads	A fatherhood program operated by Family Service of Greater New Orleans that uses the National Fatherhood Initiative's 24/7 Dad® curriculum to train fathers in parenting, communication, anger management, and employment skills.
1	Saul's Light Foundation	Provides holistic support to families experiencing a NICU stay or stillbirth with emerging programming specifically focused on fathers of NICU babies.
1	The First 72+	Assists individuals returning from incarceration with immediate re-entry needs, stabilization services, and family reunification support.
1	*Training Grounds	A life-skills development program focused on equipping parents, including men and fathers with the skills to be effective parents, including job readiness and personal growth.
2	*City of Baton Rouge Fatherhood Initiative	A municipal initiative promoting responsible fatherhood through education, workforce connections, and community partnerships.

Public Health Region	Organization / Program	Description
2	*Dedicated Dads	A fatherhood education program operated by Family Road of Greater Baton Rouge that promotes responsible, committed fatherhood through support groups, case management, parenting skills training, employment assistance, child support education, and life skills development.
2	Families Helping Families	A statewide resource organization supporting families of children with disabilities or special healthcare needs through education and advocacy.
2	Family Road of Greater Baton Rouge	Offers parenting education, fatherhood programming, and family stabilization services.
2	*Fathers on a Mission	Community-based initiative supporting men in becoming engaged, responsible fathers and leaders in their families.
2	One Hundred Black Men	A national mentoring and leadership organization providing education, mentoring, health, and economic empowerment programs.
2	St. George Men's Club	A faith-based men's group focused on mentorship, accountability, service, and family leadership.
3	Crossroads Pregnancy Resource Center	Provides pregnancy support, parenting education, material assistance, and family-strengthening services.
3	*Inside-Out Dad/ Partners in Parenting	Evidence-based parenting programs designed for incarcerated or justice-involved fathers to support healthy family relationships.
4	*All Pro Dad	A national fatherhood program of Family First, co-founded by Mark Merrill and NFL Hall of Fame coach Tony Dungy in 1997. The school-based chapter program holds monthly breakfast gatherings where dads and children engage in character-based conversations and activities.
4	Families Helping Families	A statewide resource organization supporting families of children with disabilities or special healthcare needs through education and advocacy.
4	KidStrong Acadiana	A child development program focused on physical fitness, confidence, and family involvement.
	Rapides Station Community Ministries	Empowers families by re-establishing family values based on spiritual concepts, providing resources and support to strengthen family bonds.
4	The Family Tree	Provides parenting education, counseling, and prevention services to strengthen families and prevent child maltreatment.
5	Calcasieu Parish Headstart	Provides early childhood education, health, and family support services for low-income children and their families.

Public Health Region	Organization / Program	Description
5	Calcasieu Parish Police Jury	The parish governing authority supporting community services, public safety, and family-focused initiatives.
5	*Dedicated Dads	Provides recurring father and child activities, including peer circles.
5	Families Helping Families	A statewide resource organization supporting families of children with disabilities or special healthcare needs through education and advocacy.
5	Family and Youth Counseling Agency	Offers behavioral health, counseling, and family support services for children, youth, and parents.
6	Fatherhood Program: *24/7 Dad Curriculum	An evidence-based *National Fatherhood Initiative curriculum promoting responsible fatherhood and healthy relationships.
6	Project LIFT / Lifted Men Fatherhood Program	Supports fathers through life-skills training, employment readiness, and parenting education.
6	Rapides Parish Schools	Offer a variety of resources to help families actively participate in their child's education
7	Faith in Fathers	Faith-based fatherhood program funded through federal Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) grants.
7	Families Helping Families	A statewide resource organization supporting families of children with disabilities or special healthcare needs through education and advocacy.
7	Harbor House	Provides shelter, advocacy, and supportive services for survivors of domestic violence and their children.
8	*All Pro Dad	A national fatherhood program of Family First, co-founded by Mark Merrill and NFL Hall of Fame coach Tony Dungy in 1997. The school-based chapter program holds monthly breakfast gatherings where dads and children engage in character-based conversations and activities.
8	Children's Coalition for Northeast Louisiana	A regional coalition coordinating services and advocacy to improve outcomes for children and families.
8	* D.A.D. Project South	The southern chapter of The DAD (Developing Accountable Dads) Project, a nonprofit that partners with local youth organizations and connects fathers through engaging STEAM days with children, "Man Cave" peer support sessions, community events, and toy drives.
9	Life Choices of Monroe	Offers pregnancy support, parenting education, and family resources, including "Dr. Dad" curriculum.
9	Parenting Center of St. Tammany Parish Hospital	Provides parenting education, support groups, and family wellness programming.
9	*Promoting Opportunities for Paternal Support (POPS)	Supports non-custodial parents with employment, parenting education, and child support compliance.
9	*St. Tammany Parenting Center	Offers parenting classes, family support services, and child development education, including the "Boot Camp for New Dads" workshop.

Public Health Region	Organization / Program	Description
Faith-based	Assemblies of God	A faith organization supporting community outreach, family ministries, and social services through local churches.
Faith-based	Historical Louisiana First Jurisdiction; Church of God in Christ	A faith organization supporting community outreach, family stability, and social services.
Faith-based	Louisiana Baptist Convention	Provides faith-based family support, education, and community engagement initiatives.
Faith-based	Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops	Coordinates Catholic social services, advocacy, and family-focused initiatives statewide.
Faith-based	Louisiana Home and Foreign Missions Baptist Convention	Supports church-based outreach, family strengthening, and mission-driven community services.
Faith-based	Louisiana Missionary Baptist State Convention	A statewide faith organization supporting congregational outreach, family support, and community initiatives.
Faith-based	United Pentecostal Church, International	A global faith organization providing church-based family, youth, and community support programs.
Statewide	Children's Cabinet	A cross-agency body coordinating state policy and services to improve outcomes for children and families.
Statewide	Children's Cabinet Advisory Board	Provides stakeholder guidance and recommendations to support the work of the Children's Cabinet.
Statewide	Council on Children of Incarcerated Parents	Advises on policies and practices impacting children with incarcerated parents.
Statewide	Council on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren	Addresses the needs of grandparents and relative caregivers raising children.
Statewide	DCFS Child Support Enforcement	Administers child support services to promote financial stability and parental responsibility.
Statewide	Geaux Far Louisiana	Coalition focused on shared planning and policy efforts to improve perinatal and early childhood systems, including fatherhood engagement.
Statewide	Louisiana Association of United Ways	A statewide network supporting community-based programs for health, education, and financial stability.
Statewide	Louisiana Department of Health	Oversees public health programs including maternal, child, and family health services.
Statewide	Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries	Manages natural resources and supports outdoor education and youth engagement programs.
Statewide	Louisiana Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Grantees	Federally funded programs supporting relationship education, fatherhood, and family stability across Louisiana, with a grantee webpage for locating local grantees by parish/region.
Statewide	*Louisiana Paternity Establishment Program	Assists families with establishing legal paternity to support child well-being and parental responsibility.
Statewide	Louisiana Superintendent Association	Represents district superintendents and supports statewide education leadership.

Existing Resources & Programs to Promote Fatherhood Engagement Outside of Louisiana

[24/7 Dad®](#) National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) is an evidence-based fatherhood curriculum used nationwide that supports fathers in developing parenting skills for raising children, and to have fathers look beyond themselves and learn about healthy masculinity, discipline, and work/family balance through structured group engagement, critical thinking, and reflection.

[All Pro Dad](#) is a national father engagement program co-founded by retired NFL coach, Tony Dungy, that focuses on making fathers more visible to children in schools and in the community, and is also dedicated to strengthening families and marriages by providing practical guidance and tips on being an involved and supportive father, parenting teenagers, being a single dad, and being part of a blended family.

[Boot Camp for New Dads](#) is a community- and evidence-based father-to-father educational group that equips men with various skills to engage with their infants healthily and instills confidence among its participants.

[Casey Family Programs](#) is a national organization focused on safely reducing the need for foster care in the U.S. by analyzing the benefits of father involvement and offering strategies and resources that support fatherhood initiatives and interventions in child welfare, including related to child abuse and neglect prevention.

[City Dads](#) groups are a network of local fatherhood peer groups across major U.S. cities that are devoted to offering support to new and experienced fathers by connecting fathers and providing a safe space where advice can be shared and connections can be made.

[Dad Doula](#) is a support and education program from Melanated Daddy designed to help fathers and other non-birthing parents prepare for and transition into parenthood by providing resources, guidance, and tools throughout pregnancy, labor, delivery, and beyond.

[Doulas4Dads](#) is Daddy University's all-male doula program designed to educate and support fathers in newborn care, postpartum skills, and family involvement by providing targeted training and guidance through the postpartum period.

[Early Head Start](#) is a federally funded early childhood program serving low-income pregnant people and families with children under the age of three by providing home-based services, group socialization activities, and skills for parents to enhance the lives of their children.

[Family Connects](#) is a long-standing nonprofit that delivers counseling, prevention, training, early childhood, and family support services to children, adults, and families facing trauma, mental health challenges, domestic violence, and other life stressors, helping strengthen family bonds, build resilience, and connect parents to resources that promote thriving and well-being.

[Fathers & Men of Professional Basketball Players](#) is an international father-led organization that leverages mentorship – including with fathers of professional National Basketball Association (NBA) players and former NBA players – leadership development, education, and community programming to strengthen families and promote positive father involvement.

[Fathers Incorporated](#) (FI) is a national non-profit organization that advocates for social and legislative changes that will assist fathers in healthy involvement with their children while also providing evidence-based programs and training that are changing the cultural definition of family and work to be inclusive of fathers.¹³⁰

[First Five Alameda County's Father Corps](#) is a collaborative initiative that advocates for father-friendly services and systems, builds provider capacity, and supports fathers and father-figures to meaningfully engage with their children and strengthen their parenting skills while reshaping community and agency practices to better recognize and serve fathers and families.

[Head Start](#) is a federal early childhood education and family support program that serves low-income children and families and promotes father engagement by creating inclusive, father-friendly environments, promoting respectful communication, and offering strategies and opportunities for meaningful father involvement in family and program activities.

[Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center](#) has abundant resources and tips for father engagement strategies and is a great starting point when attempting to acclimate community partners with larger organizations like the Bureau of Family Health.

[Healthy Families America](#) is primarily a home visiting model best equipped to work with families who may have histories of trauma, intimate partner violence, mental health and/or substance use disorder issues with voluntary services beginning prenatally or right after the birth of a baby, intensively, and long-term (3 to 5 years after the birth of the baby).

[Healthy Start](#) is a free community-based maternal and early childhood support program that helps pregnant people, new parents, and families access education, care coordination, home visiting, resource connections, and tailored services (including father-focused support like TEAM Dad) to promote healthy pregnancies, childbirth, and early family well-being.

[National Compadres Network](#) is an organization with 30 of experience that aids the involvement of Hispanic & Latino fathers within their child's life through working with local community partners to empower men and to reduce the incidence of substance abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, teen pregnancy, gang violence, homophobia, racial inequity, and other societal issues.

[National Fatherhood Initiative \(NFI\)](#) was founded in 1994 and is a national leader in father engagement by equipping organizations with training, curricula, and technical assistance to build father-inclusive programs across human service systems, including fatherhood literature and guides on father-related topics related to non-custodial dads, maternal gatekeeping, communication, and domestic violence.¹³¹

National Parents Organization is a non-profit advocacy organization that promotes shared parenting policies and practices to ensure children maintain strong, meaningful relationships with both parents after separation or divorce.

Nurse Family Partnership is an evidence-based, voluntary home-visiting program that pairs first-time parents, typically low-income expectant mothers, with specially trained nurses who provide regular support, guidance, and resources from early pregnancy through the child's second birthday to improve health, development, and family well-being.

Parenting Inside Out[®] is an evidence-based parenting skills program for those incarcerated, on parole or probation, that strengthens the father/child relationships by providing an established network for which children have a means for communicating and engaging with their parents and pushing to break any stigma around incarcerated parents, therefore improving the child/parent relationship, regardless of the circumstance.

Parents As Teachers provides home visits with trained experts who educate parents on how to become the first and most important teacher in their child's life, offering support services from pregnancy to kindergarten and serves at-risk families such as teen parents, parents or children with a disability, low-income families, parents without a high school diploma or GED, or those experiencing substance use disorder.

Postpartum Support International was founded in 1987 and is a global organization that promotes awareness, prevention, and treatment of mental health issues related to childbearing for men experiencing postpartum mental health issues.

Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit: Resources from the Field is an in-depth handbook, provided by HHS, which guides organizations step-by-step, from program development to one-on-one activities, in designing, implementing, and sustaining father engagement and responsible fatherhood programs.

Strong Fathers Strong Families is an organization that promotes family and community health by engaging fathers through culturally relevant programming and father-focused resources.

The Art of Fatherhood is a podcast founded by Art Eddy, that elevates diverse fatherhood narratives through interviews with professional athletes and public figures, highlighting the emotional and relational dimensions of engaged fathering and allows guests to share their unique perspectives on fatherhood and what it means to be a loving father.

The Family Check-Up assists families with young children experiencing high stress in addressing early childhood behavioral and developmental challenges that arise before these concerns become more serious or problematic, including three visits with a family coach and tailored interventions for decreasing children's conduct, academic, and internalized problems while increasing parental involvement and positive parenting.

[The Fatherhood Project](#) is an organization in the Department of Psychiatry at the Massachusetts General Hospital aiming to improve the health and well-being of children by empowering fathers to be active, informed, and emotionally engaged through evidence-based research in father engagement interventions.

[The Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center: Fatherhood Resource Hub](#) is an independent, nonpartisan research group based out of Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education and Human Development that builds on the science of the developing child and relies on evidence to determine the state policies and strategies that create the conditions all infants and toddlers need to thrive.

[WATCH D.O.G.S.](#) (Dads of Great Students) is a national program that connects thousands of fathers and father figures to local schools and volunteers to serve at least one day a year in a variety of school activities, emphasizing a father's role in the child's education and helping to build a stronger relationship between local schools and fathers.

Summary Analysis of Listening Sessions and Survey Responses

Key Findings from Statewide Fatherhood Engagement Survey and Listening Session Data

Prepared by the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children

January 2026

Methodology & Data Collection:

The Fatherhood Engagement Task Force employed a mixed-methods research design to capture the breadth and complexity of fathers' experiences across Louisiana. The research followed established best practices and was intentionally designed to center fathers' lived experiences by elevating their voices through regional listening sessions and a statewide survey.

A statewide online survey was conducted from October 3 to December 6, 2025 and received 547 responses from dads across Louisiana. Questions included topics on custody, parenting time, employment and financial security, child support, mental and emotional health, access to supports, and experiences navigating state and local systems.

In addition, the Task Force convened nine focus group-style listening sessions, which were held in each of the Louisiana Department of Health regions, including New Orleans, Monroe, Hammond, Lake Charles, Lafayette, Baton Rouge, Shreveport, Alexandria, and one virtual statewide session via Zoom. The Task Force engaged with approximately 150 fathers during these sessions, which were structured as open forums for discussion that covered a range of topics, including fatherhood and co-parenting, employment, and navigating public systems. Transcripts from all listening sessions were coded using a codebook, and recurring major themes and shared learnings across regions were identified.

Summary of Listening Sessions:

Across all nine listening sessions, fathers shared similar narratives reflecting both their deep commitment to their children and the barriers they face in remaining engaged parents. While each session had a unique local context, fathers across regions described similar experiences, emphasizing deep pride in fatherhood alongside the strain of navigating complex family, legal, and economic systems that often limit consistent involvement.

Key qualitative findings from listening sessions:

- **Pride and Purpose.** A recurring theme across listening sessions was fathers' pride in and purpose of fatherhood. Fathers consistently reported that fatherhood is one of the most important and defining roles in their lives.
- **Emotional Availability and Connection.** Fathers from all regions emphasized the importance of emotional presence, daily involvement, and long-term guidance in their definitions of good fatherhood. Many fathers also reflected on how they define good fatherhood in contrast to their experiences of fatherhood in their own childhoods.
- **Relationship Obstacles.** Fathers described a number of obstacles to staying consistently involved in their children's lives. These included contentious co-parenting relationships, long and expensive legal processes, and custody policies that often push fathers to the periphery of their children's lives even when they are interested and able to stay engaged. Fathers also shared stories of unpredictable visitation schedules, lack of decision-making authority, and difficulties enforcing agreed-upon parenting plans.
- **Financial Stress.** Financial stressors were consistently raised by fathers as one of the largest barriers to ongoing engagement. Fathers spoke to the conflict between needing to work to meet their financial obligations and also being physically present in their children's daily lives. Long or inflexible work schedules, transportation costs, and the expense of maintaining two separate households also created barriers to involvement for fathers from different regions.
- **Mistrusted and Marginalized.** Fathers shared feelings of being marginalized, mistrusted, or dismissed by systems that impact their families, including in courts, schools, hospitals, and social service agencies. Fathers shared experiences of having to continuously prove themselves as legitimate parents or having to go through processes that make mothers the default parent, even when parenting is shared.
- **Mental and Emotional Weight.** Many fathers discussed mental and emotional challenges with managing chronic stress, including that of parenting under constraints, court involvement, financial strain, unresolved grief, and personal trauma. Many fathers also reported feeling pressure to always appear strong or on top of things while also managing fear, anger, sadness, or frustration, and a lack of available outlets for support.

- **Disconnect Between Needs and Supports.** Fathers consistently reported a disconnect between the support they need to remain actively in their children's lives and the support that is accessible to them. Fathers spoke to fragmented systems, a lack of information, and supports that are often not designed with fathers in mind. They also highlighted the lack of a clear entry point for support that is coordinated and father-focused, including legal guidance, mental health services, and peer support.
- **Policy Priorities.** The most frequently cited policy priorities were related to reforming custody and child support policies, and investing in father-led and father-centered programs. Fathers advocated for policies that address the conflict with mothers, support fairness and consistency, recognize shared parenting, and support economic stability and ongoing meaningful involvement in their children's lives.

Summary of Survey Data:

The Fatherhood Engagement Task Force survey was distributed to fathers across Louisiana from October through December 2025. Responses were received from 547 fathers, representing 15 parishes. Approximately 100 respondents reported only having adult children, while the remaining respondents were fathers with children under 18 years old. The survey included questions to better understand fathers' experiences related to parenting time and custody, employment and financial stability, child support, co-parenting, relationships with children, mental and emotional well-being, access to support and resources, and experiences with courts, schools, and public systems. The survey findings reinforce and quantify the patterns that emerged in the listening sessions.

Key quantitative findings from the survey:

- Fathers report a strong commitment to remain engaged or to be more engaged in parenting their children. More than 90% of respondents identified emotional presence, quality time, teaching and guidance, and supporting children's education as essential elements of being a good father, confirming that fathers see themselves as central figures in their children's lives.
- Many fathers maintain frequent contact with their children, but access varies based on education and living arrangements. While 60% of fathers reported seeing their children every day, 14% reported seeing their children less than once per week or not at all, highlighting uneven access despite a strong desire for involvement. Fathers with a bachelor's degree or higher were more likely to report daily contact than fathers with lower educational attainment, and fathers whose children live with them full-time reported the most consistent access. Additionally, fathers with shared custody, visitation-only arrangements, or no custody were significantly more likely to experience less contact with their children.

- Fathers with limited or no custody reported the highest levels of dissatisfaction with parenting time. Specifically, 68% of fathers with visitation-only arrangements and 65% of fathers with no custody reported being very dissatisfied with the time they spend with their children.
- Satisfaction with time spent with children also varied by children's age. Fathers with only adult children over age 18 reported the highest satisfaction and the lowest dissatisfaction with how much time they were able to spend with their children (44% very satisfied and 3% very dissatisfied), while fathers with children ages 5-18 reported the highest dissatisfaction (22% very dissatisfied). This pattern may reflect life-stage differences, such as greater flexibility for fathers of adult children and more custody and scheduling restrictions for fathers of school-aged children.
- Work schedule was a more common barrier for fathers of young children (63% of fathers with only children under age 5) than for fathers with only adult children (47%).
- Legal systems play a significant role in shaping fathers' ability to parent. Nearly a quarter of fathers reported going through legal proceedings to gain access to their children. Among fathers who had direct interaction with Family Court, the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), or Child Support Enforcement, over 60% reported dissatisfaction with how their concerns were addressed.
- Economic pressure is a significant barrier to consistent engagement, particularly for fathers balancing caregiving responsibilities and inflexible work schedules. Nearly 60% of fathers reported that work schedules interfere with the time they want to spend with their children. This barrier was reported more frequently by fathers with a bachelor's degree or higher and by fathers whose children live with them full-time or part-time, reflecting the difficulty of balancing caregiving responsibilities with work demands.
- Fathers report widespread perceptions of unfairness in systems that affect their engagement with their children, with approximately 64% reporting dissatisfaction with Child Support Enforcement and 65% reporting dissatisfaction with DCFS.
- Emotional stress is a common concern among fathers, especially those with limited parenting time. About two-thirds of respondents reported experiencing some type of stress, sadness, or worry regularly, and nearly half reported that emotional challenges sometimes or regularly interfere with being the father they want to be.

- Access to mental health support is uneven. While some fathers reported having access to support, roughly one-third indicated they do not feel they have meaningful access to mental health resources.
- Fathers rely heavily on informal supports while seeking more structured assistance. Family members, friends, and faith communities were the most commonly cited sources of support; however, interest in formal fatherhood programs was strong across all age groups and custody arrangements.

There is strong demand for father-centered programs and services. A combined 85% of fathers surveyed said they would participate or might participate in fatherhood programs, with the highest interest in mentoring, mental health support, legal assistance, and parenting education.

Together, these findings confirm that fathers across Louisiana are deeply invested in their children but face systemic, economic, and emotional barriers that limit their ability to fully engage or be fully present in their children's lives. The alignment between survey results and listening session themes underscores the need for coordinated father-inclusive policies and programs that address both greater access and support across systems.

Findings Across All Data Sources:

1. Fatherhood Roles and Identity

Across listening sessions and survey responses, fathers consistently described fatherhood as a defining part of their identity and one of the most meaningful roles in their lives. Fathers emphasized that their role extends far beyond financial support to include emotional presence, guidance, and modeling values such as accountability and respect. Many described intentional efforts to break generational cycles of absence, trauma, and emotional distance, often referencing faith communities, mentors, and peer networks as sources of growth and accountability.

Survey findings strongly reinforce these perspectives. More than 95% of fathers surveyed agreed that emotional presence, quality time, teaching and guidance, and supporting children's education are essential components of being a good father. Collectively, survey data indicate that fathers overwhelmingly view themselves as active, essential caregivers rather than secondary figures in their children's lives.

2. Parenting Time, Custody, and Co-Parenting

Parenting time and custody arrangements emerged as some of the most significant challenges across both data sources. Fathers described barriers to maintaining stable relationships with their children due to contentious co-parenting dynamics, inconsistent court rulings, high legal costs, and policies that limit access even when fathers are seeking involvement. Many emphasized that custody designations and relocation laws create unequal decision-making power and destabilize children's routines.

Survey data illustrate the scope and consequences of these barriers. While 60% of fathers reported seeing their children every day, 14% reported seeing them less than once per week or not at all. Fathers with limited time or no custody reported higher dissatisfaction with parenting time, with 68% of fathers with visitation only and 65% of fathers with no custody reporting being very dissatisfied. These patterns highlight the strong relationship between custody arrangements, access, and fathers' sense of engagement.

3. Employment, Finances, and Child Support

Across listening sessions and survey responses, fathers consistently identified economic pressure as a significant barrier to engagement. During listening sessions, fathers described long or inflexible work schedules, holding multiple jobs, and the challenge of balancing financial obligations with the need to remain present in their children's lives. Many emphasized the tension between providing financially and having the time and flexibility needed to participate in daily parenting activities.

Survey findings reinforce these concerns. Nearly 60% of fathers reported that work schedules prevent them from spending the time they want with their children. Fathers also expressed frustration with child support systems that do not reflect shared custody, real income, or caregiving contributions. Among fathers with direct interaction with Child Support Enforcement, approximately 64% reported dissatisfaction, underscoring widespread concern that enforcement practices often undermine financial stability and consistent parental involvement.

4. Experiences with Courts, Schools, DCFS, and Other Systems

Fathers across all regions described challenging interactions with courts, schools, hospitals, and social service agencies, often feeling marginalized or required to prove their legitimacy as parents. Listening session participants emphasized inconsistent rulings, unclear processes, limited communication, and systems that feel adversarial rather than supportive, contributing to conflict and emotional strain.

Survey data mirror these experiences. Among fathers with direct Family Court involvement, fewer than 2 in 10 reported that their concerns were addressed effectively. Experiences with DCFS followed a similar pattern. Among fathers who interacted with DCFS, approximately 65% reported dissatisfaction.

5. Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

Mental and emotional strain emerged as a cross-cutting issue across both data sources. Fathers described chronic stress related to financial pressure, court involvement, grief, relationship breakdowns, and limited access to their children. Many spoke about feeling pressure to appear strong while

coping internally with deep frustration, sadness, or other mental health-related issues such as anxiety. Survey findings also highlight these experiences. A combined 31% of fathers reported feeling stressed, sad, or worried often or always, and nearly half reported that emotional challenges sometimes or regularly interfere with being the father they want to be. Fathers who rarely or never see their children reported high stress at nearly twice the rate of those who see their children daily. At the same time, about one-third of fathers reported lacking meaningful resources or access to mental health support, highlighting a gap between need and available resources.

6. Community Supports and Service Navigation

Fathers consistently emphasized the importance of informal support networks, including family, friends, faith communities, mentors, and community spaces. These relationships were often described as more accessible and responsive than formal systems or community resources, particularly when fathers felt excluded or discouraged by public agencies.

Survey responses confirmed these sentiments, with 74% of fathers claiming to get support from family, 61% obtaining support from friends or peers, and 42% of fathers looking to faith communities for sources of informal support and guidance. At the same time, a strong interest in structured support remains. A combined 85% of fathers said they would participate or might participate in fatherhood programs, with particular interest in mentoring, mental health support, legal education, and peer connection. These findings underscore the opportunity to strengthen service navigation through father-centered, community-based approaches.

7. Policy and Program Recommendations

Across the listening sessions and survey results, fathers articulated a clear call for systems that recognize them as equal caregivers and prioritize children's long-term stability. Listening session findings highlight the urgent need to reform custody and relocation laws, modernize child support policies, and improve system responsiveness and communication with fathers.

Fathers also emphasized the importance of investing in father-centered programs that address economic stability, housing, transportation, mental health, and workforce development. Strong interest in participation, combined with widespread dissatisfaction with existing systems, highlights a clear opportunity to redesign policies and programs in partnership with fathers to strengthen family stability and child wellbeing.

Conclusion:

Findings from the statewide fatherhood engagement survey and listening sessions resoundingly demonstrate that fathers in Louisiana care about and are invested in their children and define fatherhood as a core part of their identities. Fathers from all family types described fatherhood as a multifaceted role that included not only financial provision, but also emotional presence, daily involvement, and long-term guidance and mentorship. Data collected from survey respondents overwhelmingly echoes this sentiment, with the vast majority of fathers prioritizing emotional support, quality time, teaching/mentoring, and educational support when defining effective fatherhood. Listening sessions also revealed that many fathers expressed a strong desire to disrupt cycles of absence, trauma, and instability, particularly in cases where they did not have father figures in their own lives.

Qualitative and quantitative data also paint a clear picture of systemic and structural barriers that fathers face and that impact the ability of fathers to be fully and equally engaged in their children's lives. Listening session data revealed that, despite many fathers being in frequent contact with their children, they may still have limited or inconsistent access to their children, and a large percentage of fathers participating in listening sessions reported having to go to court to receive parenting time. Economic instability and financial stress associated with work were also commonly discussed and reported as a top challenge that inhibited fathers from being fully present in their children's day-to-day lives. Fathers also commonly shared that their interactions with Family Courts, child support, and social service agencies felt either adversarial or inconsistent and unresponsive to their needs. These findings were largely corroborated in quantitative findings, which also reflected low levels of satisfaction with Family Court and the belief that systems that influence custody, visitation, and child support do not treat fathers fairly.

Collectively, the similarities between listening session data and survey findings paint a compelling portrait of fathers in Louisiana, highlighting the need for a more streamlined, father-inclusive approach to systems and programmatic policy design and implementation. Fathers are asking for more fair, clear, and transparent systems that recognize them as equal caregivers and facilitate fathers' ability to engage meaningfully and consistently in their children's lives. In tandem with policy reform, efforts that more intentionally address barriers to engagement, along with investment in father-centered services, offer the opportunity to not only strengthen father engagement but also reduce conflict, improve family and child well-being, and produce benefits for families and communities statewide.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Description
ACF	Administration for Children and Families
AV	Access and Visitation
BESE	Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
BFH	Bureau of Family Health
CASA	Court Appointed Special Advocate
CB	Children's Bureau
CBCAP	Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention
CCAB	Children's Cabinet Advisory Board
CCAL	Child Care Association of Louisiana
CCAP	Child Care Assistance Program
CFSR	Child and Family Services Review
CINC	Child in Need of Care
CIP	Court Improvement Program
CIR/UIR-A	Comprehensive Intervention Required / Urgent Intervention Required - Academics
CYSHCN	Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs
DAD	Developing Accountable Dads
DCFS	Department of Children and Family Services
DOL	Department of Labor
DPS&C	Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ELPT	English Language Proficiency Test
ESA	Education Scholarship Accounts
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
ETA	Employment and Training Administration
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
FI	Fathers Incorporated
FINS	Families in Need of Services
FORGE	Family, Opportunity, Resilience, Grit and Engagement
FPC	Family Preservation Courts

Acronym	Description
FYSB	Family and Youth Services Bureau
GATOR	Giving All True Opportunity to Rise
GED	General Educational Development
HEART	Helping Every Area of Relationships Thrive
HHS	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
HMRF	Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood
HR	House Resolution
HRSA	Health Resources and Services Administration
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individualized Education Program
IFSP	Individualized Family Service Plan
IM	Information Memorandum
IRIP	Individual Reading Improvement Plan
LADOJ	Louisiana Department of Justice
LDOE	Louisiana Department of Education
LDH	Louisiana Department of Health
LEA	Local Education Agency
LEAP	Louisiana Educational Assessment Program
MEE	Motivational Educational Entertainment
NFI	National Fatherhood Initiative
NICU	Neonatal Intensive Care Units
NOLA	New Orleans, Louisiana
NSCH	National Survey of Children's Health
OFA	Office of Family Assistance
OHS	Office of Head Start
OPH	Office of Public Health
ORO	Office of Regional Operations
P.O.P.S	Promoting Opportunities for Paternal Support
PAFE	Parent and Family Engagement
R.S.	Revised Statute
SEA	State Education Agency
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
WIC	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

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