



SNAPSHOT

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Louisiana Public School Truancy

Unexcused Absenteeism in Louisiana's Public Schools

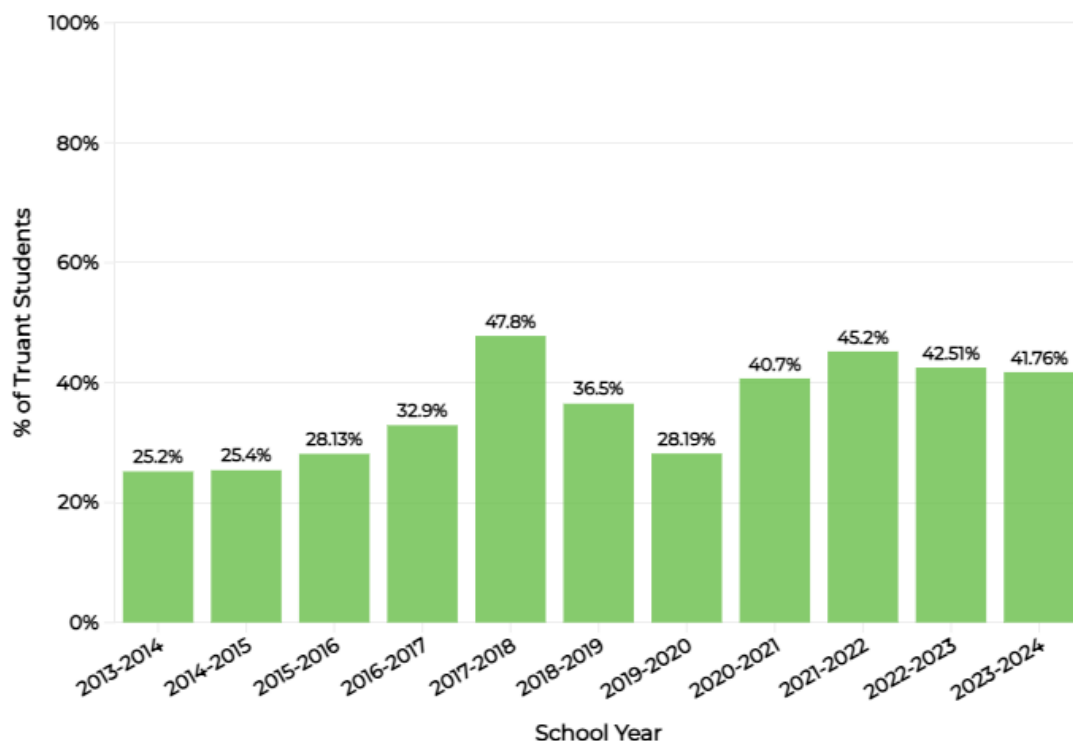
Empty hallways and quiet classrooms are increasingly common in Louisiana's K-12 public schools. Not only is [enrollment dropping](#), but attendance remains below the pre-COVID-19 pandemic average, leaving officials to direct efforts toward increasing the attendance of enrolled students.

Absenteeism laws and regulations vary across the United States, determined by state agencies. Some states define a truant as having three unexcused absences, while other states allow for upwards of 10 unexcused absences before filing truancy charges.

The [Louisiana Department of Education](#) defines truancy as a student who has received five or more unexcused absences in a semester.

Over the past four years, Louisiana has witnessed a higher-than-average statewide truancy rate. Spanning the last 11 years, the average remained around 36%. In the school year following the COVID-19 pandemic, however, Louisiana truancy rose to a consistent rate of 40% or higher.

Percent of Truant Students, Statewide



Source: Louisiana Department of Education

Some parishes, however, have experienced steeper increases in truant students compared to neighboring parishes.

In 2013, the Department of Education found that Tensas Parish enrolled 659 students and had a truancy rate of 32.4%. A decade later that rate increased to 67.5%, with only 328 students enrolled that year.

Just 60 miles north, East Carroll Parish had one of the lowest truancy rates in the state during the 2023-24 school year at 24.1%. These disparities have caught the attention of several school districts and organizations, as they formulate new approaches to the issue.

(Data was not available from Rapides Parish for the 2023-24 school year.)

Highest & Lowest Truancy Rates, Statewide (2023-2024)

Highest	Lowest
1. Tensas Parish – 67.5%	1. Ascension Parish – 20.6%
2. Point Coupee Parish – 66%	2. Red River Parish – 23.6%
3. St. Bernard Parish – 61.8%	3. East Carroll Parish – 24.1%
4. St. Landry Parish – 61.1%	4. St. James Parish – 24.5%

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

Beyond truancy, the [U.S. Department of Education](#) has a standardized definition for chronic absenteeism: students enrolled for more than 10 days and absent for 10% of that time, either through unexcused and excused absences.

[FutureEd](#) data on national chronic absenteeism statistics showed a national average of 23% in the 2023-24 school year, with Louisiana just 0.5% below the national rate.

The data showed lower absenteeism rates of 19% for Oklahoma and 14.8% for Alabama, while Louisiana was at 22.5%. Louisiana held a lower rate compared to Florida’s 31.4% and Mississippi’s 24.4%. Alaska held the highest chronic absenteeism rate that year at 43.4%.

High rates of unexcused absences are linked to behavioral and academic issues in youth, including eventual school dropout and substance abuse, according to the [Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement](#).

In an attempt to meet the needs of struggling school districts and prevent the negative effects of truancy on students, the Louisiana Department of Education and the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) in August reviewed a [targeted strategy](#) to boost student attendance.

The approach ranges from universal support offered to all school systems statewide to an intensive plan for select school districts with significant attendance challenges, including two monthly sessions with the department’s attendance team and employment of an attendance improvement specialist.