Baton Rouge Youth Voice Initiative

2022-23 Report

Amplifying the Voices of Baton Rouge Students
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The voices of Baton Rouge students must be heard if we are to get serious about addressing their desires for their futures and their community. Throughout the summer of 2022, Baton Rouge Youth Voice Initiative listened to our most valuable stakeholders in education – the students. In the pages ahead, you will find a student-driven report resulting from this comprehensive listening series.

We encouraged young people to show up as their authentic selves to share their stories, hopes, and vision of how Baton Rouge can better prepare them for their futures. At Baton Rouge Alliance for Students, we believe that an excellent education is every child’s birthright. We are committed to helping that become a reality, and we believe that starts with listening.
Dear Friends and Neighbors,

A community committed to the success of its youth is a community focused on its future. As Mayor-President, one of my top priorities is stabilizing the youth, family and community of Baton Rouge. As part of my commitment to uplifting and empowering youth voices, I was proud to partner with Baton Rouge Alliance for Students for the Baton Rouge Youth Voice Initiative.

This initiative is a collaborative project of the Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council, Baton Rouge Alliance for Students and Safe, Hopeful, Healthy BR. Through this initiative, hundreds of Baton Rouge youth were guided by national best practices to conduct a comprehensive listening series with the goal of creating a student-driven report on education in our capital city. Through this initiative, our coalition of partners set three key objectives:

- Identify the highest areas of need in the community from a student’s perspective
- Elevate student voices in K-12 education policy
- Develop a pipeline for student engagement at all levels of government in East Baton Rouge Parish

This Initiative began in Spring 2022 by engaging members of the Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council as social media ambassadors and youth liaisons. These student leaders participated in a listening series, conducted peer interviews and participated in focus groups while encouraging students across our community to take an online education survey – the results can be found in this report. My office was further eager to support the live, interactive “Truth Booth” experience where students shared their insights via pop-up events at various locations across the community.

As this initiative comes to completion, I encourage all Baton Rouge students to continue to use their voice for the good of our community. I look forward to continuing these conversations with our youth about the changes they wish to see for East Baton Rouge Parish. Their honest input has already had a positive impact. I hope their stories and voices will ignite longlasting change for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Sharon Weston Broome
Mayor-President
City of Baton Rouge, Parish of East Baton Rouge
# Baton Rouge Education

## By the Numbers

- **Total Students in All BR Schools**: 72,409
- **Private Schools**: 1,933
- **Magnet Schools**: 12,900
- **Central, Baker & Zachary**: 11,440
- **Charter Schools**: 8,911
- **Neighborhood Schools**: 26,926
- **State Schools**: 10,299

## Average ACT Score

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>State Average</th>
<th>EBR Parish Public Schools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Average</strong></td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>17.4</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EBR Parish Public Schools</strong></td>
<td>17.4</td>
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## Graduation Rate

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>State Average</th>
<th>EBR Parish Public Schools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Average</strong></td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>78%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EBR Parish Public Schools</strong></td>
<td>78%</td>
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## Surrounding Districts

<table>
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<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Average ACT Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zachary Community School District</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Community School District</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Baker School District</td>
<td>14.4</td>
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Baton Rouge Youth Voice Report 2022-23
Despite the diversity of student experience throughout the city including school type and geography, common themes emerged as a result of both Truth Booth popups and survey data. Two of the key areas of student concern include access to mental health supports and high-quality teaching professionals. These local concerns mirror national trends.

Common areas students would like to see addressed in their schools:

- Additional Mental Health Resources
- Educator Quality

Students shared significant concerns about crime in their communities and its impact on their ability to have a safe learning environment.
STUDENT VOICES

While traditional school district personnel have been repurposed to fill classroom vacancies, a lack of high-quality educators continues to reflect the national trend.

Educator Quality

“You can have the best programs in the world and the highest level curriculum; but if you don’t have a highly effective teacher in that classroom, you’re not going to get the results for that kid that he or she needs and deserves.” – Louisiana Superintendent of Education Cade Brumley

“I feel like you have to have a teacher who cares about you to learn.”

“Teachers who truly care about their students more than just doing their job positively helps their educational experience.”

“You grow with your support system. The more support you have, the better you do. You can still do good without support, But when you have the support, it makes it easier for you.”

Hiring teachers due to the teacher shortage has caused schools to hire poor/apathetic teachers. I feel like many students are motivated by teachers who genuinely care and encourage students to voice their opinions. However, that hasn’t been the case in the classroom. recently”

Student Well-being

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that from April through October of 2021, the proportion of children between the ages of 5 and 11 visiting an emergency department because of a mental health crisis climbed 24 percent compared to that same time period in 2019. Among 12- to 17-year-olds, the number increased by 31 percent.

“There is little to no support for students dealing with mental health or stress issues at my school.”

Vacancies

233

78
“Ready for the Future”
Few students thought schools provided them with the skills they needed to be successful in the real world. They wanted more formal training and support to help them be successful when they encounter the challenges of the next chapter.

“We are expected to act like grown-ups, but not given the resources needed to help.”

“Taxes should be taught and more ‘real-world math’”

“Inequities”
Young people in Baton Rouge are keenly aware of the pervasive divide between the northern and southern parts of the parish. Students in Baton Rouge identified crime, division, and lack of opportunity for young people as significant community improvement areas.

“Students in North Baton Rouge schools cite a lack of resources. They feel as if a lot of people don’t have much and not a lot of support exists [for] lower-income people.”

“I feel that the future of education in Baton Rouge will suffer if something does not change soon. I am scared for future generations as the schools only seem to be getting worse and more divided.”
61% of students said they would speak at a school board meeting if there were a formal way for students to participate.

Students felt inspired by taking the survey and hoped to be a part of a conversation that expressed their concerns for a better education system.
This student-driven report serves as a call to action for policymakers and civic leaders to engage young people in solutions to address our community’s challenges.

One emerging policy recommendation is to build on existing programs like the Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council and student governments to provide formal mechanisms and structures for gathering student input.

There are many bright spots in the report, including 89% of students who could name at least one teacher who truly engaged them in learning, but educators were also an area where students raised concerns. Survey responses mirrored national fears about teacher quality amid a post-pandemic staffing crisis. Providing regular school-level updates on staffing to students and families while setting public-facing hiring goals will allow the community to build confidence in the process and surface strategies for addressing critical shortage areas.

Finally, while 85% of students reported feeling like their families had high expectations of them in school, many felt unprepared by their school experiences to chart a path to the future they dream for themselves. Connecting “real-life” to school remains an area for improvement, with many students voicing a desire for skills that would help them in “everyday” adult life.