

# SCHOOL CHOICE IN LOUISIANA

School choice is the process of families choosing the K-12 educational options that best fit their children.



## Traditional Public School

Traditional public schools are neighborhood public schools open to all students living within the school's geographical boundaries. Traditional public schools are where the majority of Louisiana school-age children attend school.

Some traditional public schools are open to students outside the geographical boundaries they are physically located in. These are considered "open enrollment" schools.

Traditional public schools with or without open enrollment, cannot discriminate against students with disabilities.

## Public Charter Schools



Charter schools are innovative, independent public schools. In exchange for operational autonomy in areas such as curricular, staffing, and budgetary decision-making, all charter schools in Louisiana are held accountable for meeting student achievement goals and organizational and financial performance goals either by a local school board or by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

Louisiana offers five types of charter schools that are authorized by either a local school board or the LA Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). Charter types 1, 3, and 3B are authorized by local school boards. Charter Types 2, 4, and 5 are authorized by BESE.

Many charter schools have waiting lists and new students are often placed in a lottery.

Public charter schools cannot discriminate against students with disabilities.



## Magnet Public Schools

Magnet schools are operated within existing public school districts and focus on specific areas of interest such as math, science, technology, foreign language, or the performing arts.

Most magnet schools require an entrance assessment and minimum score and/or current GPA.

Magnet schools cannot discriminate against students with disabilities. However, a student with a disability must be able to excel in the curriculum with only accommodations.

## Online Learning



Louisiana offers several full-time online schools. These virtual schools follow a traditional academic calendar, with traditional school hours. It's just like a brick-and-mortar school, but your child can learn anywhere there's an internet connection with 24/7 access. Parents are considered learning coaches and expected to be available to assist their children when needed.

Free online virtual schools are operated by charter organizations or local school districts. Some online schools provide loaner computers to students, while others require the students to provide their own computer that meets the minimum specifications necessary to access the virtual platform.

Online virtual schools cannot discriminate against students with disabilities.

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## Nonpublic School

Louisiana school students may attend nonpublic schools often referred to as private schools, approved or not seeking state approval by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Nonpublic schools may, but are not required to get state approval. Schools wishing to be eligible for state and federal funding must be approved by BESE.

Students attending nonpublic schools not seeking state approval are not considered enrolled in a BESE-approved nonpublic school; are not eligible for Tuition Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) scholarships; not required to take state testing, and DO NOT receive a diploma carrying the same weight as a state-issued diploma.

Nonpublic schools may be faith-based or independent. All students aged 5 and above attending both nonpublic schools approved and nonpublic schools not seeking state approval must follow the Louisiana state compulsory attendance law.

Nonpublic schools that receive federal money may not discriminate against students with disabilities.

A BESE-Approved Home Study Program often referred to as “home-school”, provides Louisiana families the opportunities to independently educate their child in a BESE-Approved Home Study Program. Parents have complete control and responsibility for educating their children.

Parents determine the grade level at which they plan to teach their child during the upcoming year and parents have complete control over the curriculum but must use a sustained curriculum of quality at least equal to that offered by public schools at the same grade level.

Parents must submit an application for approval and renew the application annually.

Students who participate in a BESE-Approved Home Study program must be compliant with the state's compulsory attendance laws. Families are responsible for all home study program-related costs. Diplomas from BESE-Approved Home Study programs have the same rights and privileges as those awarded to a BESE-Approved Nonpublic School.

Students wishing to qualify for the TOPS Scholarship program must be enrolled in the BESE-Approved Home Study program for both the 11th and 12th grades and must meet TOPS' ACT requirements.

State testing is not required, however; a family may schedule state testing for their child through their local school board's testing administrator.

Students enrolled in an approved home study program are not eligible for any special education or related services from their local school district or the state.

## Approved Home Study



## Non-approved Home Study Program



Louisiana families also have the option of educating children at a Nonpublic School Not Seeking State Approval.

Students attending non-approved home study programs seeking state approval are considered a student enrolled in a Non-approved nonpublic school and are not eligible for Tuition Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) scholarships; not required to take state testing, and DO NOT receive a diploma carrying the same weight as a state-issued diploma.

Students enrolled in a non-approved home study program are not eligible for any special education or related services from their local school district or the state.



## Louisiana Special Schools

LA Special School District provides education to students with low-incidence disabilities and a variety of unique needs in the state of Louisiana.

Currently, the district operates the Louisiana School for the Deaf and Louisiana School for the Visually Impaired, along with schools located within public health facilities and correctional facilities.

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## Louisiana Scholarship Programs

Louisiana offers three scholarship programs that enable families to send their children to nonpublic schools of their choice.

To be eligible for a scholarship, students must have a family income that does not exceed 250% of the federal poverty line and must either be entering kindergarten or be enrolled in a public school with a C, D, or F letter grade during the year in which they apply.

Participating scholarship schools are not required to provide special education or related services to students with disabilities.

## Parent Petition



In 2012, Louisiana enacted a parent petition law that enables parents to transfer their children from a consistently low-performing school to the Recovery School District. The Recovery School District is a statewide school district under the Louisiana Department of Education that works together with charter operators and other educational organizations to transform academically struggling schools into high-performing schools. The Recovery School District currently oversees schools in Orleans, East Baton Rouge, and Caddo parishes.

The Recovery School District cannot discriminate against students with disabilities.



## School Choice Program for Certain Students with Exceptionalities

The School Choice Program empowers families of students with autism, developmental delay, mental disability, other health impairments, specific learning disability, and traumatic brain injury exceptionalities, with an existing IEP or service plan, and the financial resources to choose the school that will best address their child's need.

The Louisiana Department of Education will conduct a lottery to award student participation, with priority given to continuing students.

Students chosen for this program receives an educational certificate, which is paid directly to the school on behalf of the family. The certificate is worth either approximately 50% of the per-pupil allocation of state funds to the student's local district, or the school's tuition and fees, whichever is less. The amount averages around \$2,300 per year.

Schools must operate in a parish with a recent census population of 190,000 or greater. Currently, this includes Caddo, Calcasieu, East Baton Rouge, Jefferson, Lafayette, Orleans, and St. Tammany parishes.

\*For more information, visit: <https://fhfogn.org/laptic/school-choice>

