Cowen Institute reports 20 years of progress, challenges in New Orleans schools

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vrossmei@tulane.edu



A new report by the Cowen Institute shows New Orleans' charter-based public schools have made major academic gains since Hurricane Katrina, despite ongoing challenges. (Photo courtesy of Crescent City Schools)

Nearly 20 years after Hurricane Katrina reshaped the city's public education system, a new report from Tulane University's Cowen Institute offers a detailed snapshot of where New Orleans schools stand today — highlighting academic gains alongside persistent challenges and possible future hurdles.

The *2025 State of Public Education in New Orleans* (SPENO) report shows how public schools have made long-term progress in student achievement, graduation rates and college enrollment since the post-Katrina shift to a predominantly charter-based system. Today, 73 of the city's 74 public schools are charter schools, operated independently by charter operators, the majority of which are overseen by New Orleans Public Schools (NOLA-PS).

"As we reflect on the state of public education in New Orleans in 2025, it is clear that over the past 20 years, significant progress has been made," said Amanda Kruger Hill, executive director of the Cowen Institute. "College enrollment and graduation rates, along with student performance scores, are far higher than they were at the time of Hurricane Katrina. It is also notable that in 2025-2026, there will not be a single failing school in operation in the city."

Among the report's key findings:

- The high school graduation rate in New Orleans has improved by 25 percentage points since 2004 — outpacing the statewide increase of 14 points.
- More students are performing at higher levels on statewide LEAP exams. In 2024, 65% of 8th graders scored Basic or above in English Language Arts, up from 26% in 2004.
- College enrollment among public school graduates has climbed to 65%, surpassing the statewide average.

Still, the report underscores major challenges — including declining enrollment, a citywide teacher shortage and economic disparities in student outcomes.

Designed to inform families, educators, policymakers and the public, *the State of Public Education in New Orleans* compiles and contextualizes key public data on school enrollment, academic outcomes, governance and postsecondary access across the city's nearly all-charter public school system.

The report is produced biennially by the Cowen Institute, which was established at Tulane University in 2007 to track, analyze, and chronicle the education changes in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. To view the full report, visit https://www.coweninstitute.org.

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