



SNAPSHOT

August 29, 2024

Back to School: Federal Student Aid

The rate of Louisiana high school seniors applying for college financial aid fell over the last year, fueling worries about the state's shrinking higher education-bound population.

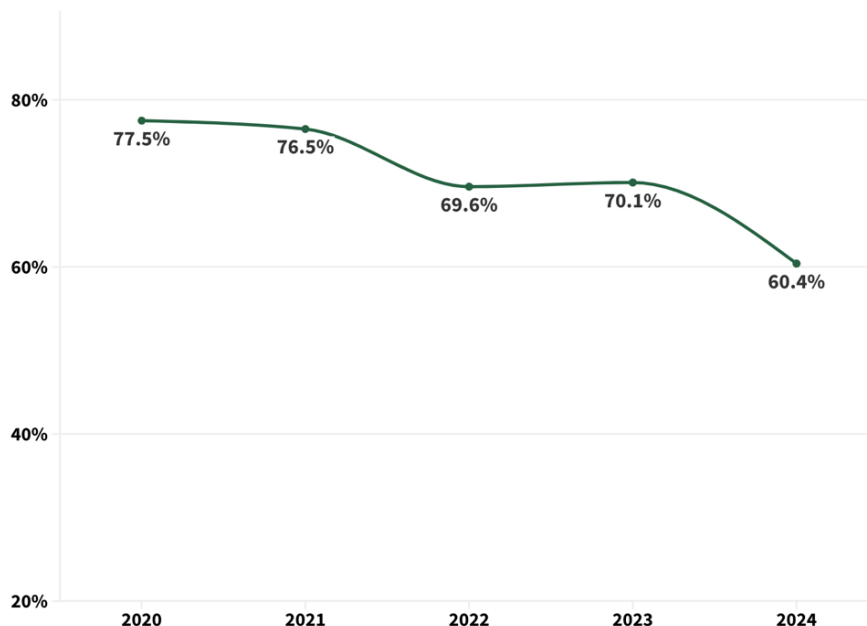
The percentage of seniors in the 2023-24 school year who completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, which calculates students' eligibility to receive grants, scholarships and loans for college, decreased by nearly 10 percentage points compared to the prior year.

While Louisiana still ranks second among states for FAFSA completions, trailing only Tennessee, this drop reflects a nationwide decline. [Data from the National College Attainment Network](#), a Washington-based nonprofit that advocates to increase access to higher education, shows 50% of seniors across the United States completed a FAFSA application for the 2023-24 school year, a 10% decrease compared to the previous academic year.

This decline likely was impacted by the [chaotic rollout of a new FAFSA](#) form.

The U.S. Department of Education updated the federal aid application process, but a delay in releasing the changes combined with technical glitches when applications opened caused disruptions and left students and families unaware of how much aid they were eligible to receive.

Estimated Percent of LA High School Seniors Completing FAFSA by Year



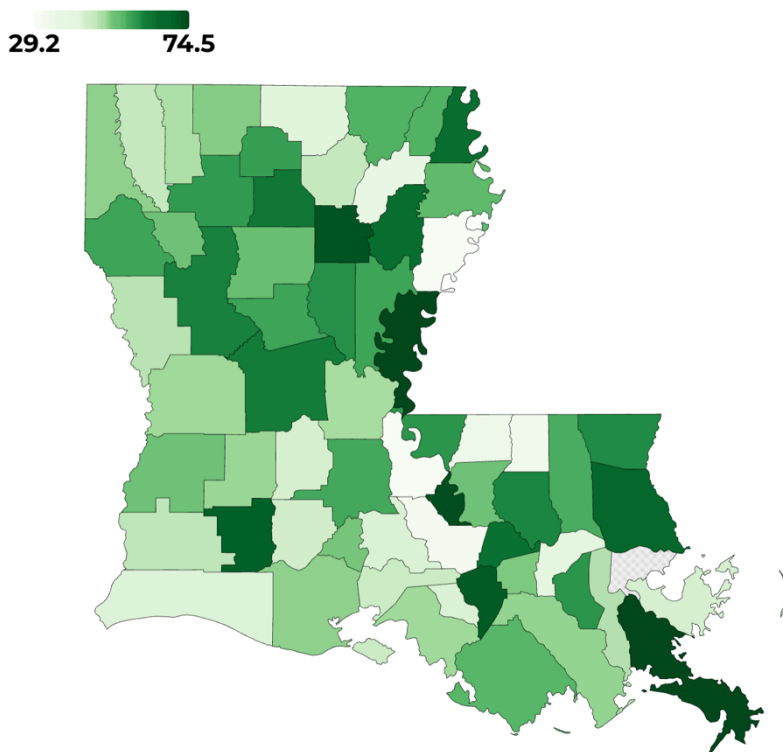
Source: National College Attainment Network

An estimated 60% of Louisiana’s high school class of 2024 completed a FAFSA through Aug. 16, according to the National College Attainment Network, which compiles federal education department data for its state-by-state tracking.

The percentage of completed FAFSA applications is expected to decline even further for subsequent high school classes after the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education repealed a policy in March that had required students to apply for federal student aid to graduate.

The policy change takes effect January 2025.

Estimated Percent of Seniors Completing FAFSA by Parish School District, 2024



The map shows the percentage of the high school class of 2024 that completed a FAFSA application in each parish, excluding data from charter schools and the five city-based school districts across Louisiana. Orleans Parish also was excluded because its high concentration of charter schools made it difficult to determine a school-districtwide score.

Roughly 92% of parish public school districts saw a decrease in the rate of seniors completing FAFSA by June 28 compared to the last year, according to the National College Attainment Network.

Only three parishes increased in the rate of FAFSA completions for high school seniors in the 2023-24 school year: Plaquemines, Franklin and St. Landry.

Source: National College Attainment Network

The parishes with the lowest percentage of seniors completing the paperwork were Pointe Coupee, Tensas and Iberville with 29%, 31% and 32% respectively.

Meanwhile, the parishes with the highest completion percentages were Concordia, Plaquemines and West Baton Rouge with 75%, 74% and 73% respectively.

Iberville Parish saw the sharpest decline in FAFSA completions with only 32% of the high school class of 2024 completing the form compared to 74% the prior year, a 57% decrease.

According to data from the National College Attainment Network, the students who need college financial aid the most apply for it at a lower rate than students who do not.

An estimated 63% of seniors in the class of 2024 at high-income high schools completed a FAFSA application, while only 55% of seniors at low-income high schools have done the same.

The National College Attainment Network defines a high school as high-income if fewer than 50% of its enrolled students are eligible for free or reduced lunch programs. Low-income schools are defined as having more than 50% of its enrolled students qualify for free or reduced lunch.

The U.S. Department of Education will have a [phased rollout](#) of the FAFSA form for the next application cycle. Applications will open for a limited number of students and institutions on Oct. 1. On or before Dec. 1, the department will make the application available to all students.

For more information on FAFSA and the deadlines to submit applications, visit the Federal Student Aid Office's website at: <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>

Part 2 of a three-part series looking at public K-12 education and higher education in Louisiana.