



Cowen Institute
TULANE UNIVERSITY

ANNUAL POLL 2024-25

**Parents' and Guardians'
Opinions on K-12
Public Education in
New Orleans**

**The Cowen Institute
Poll Policy Brief No. 2
December 2024**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

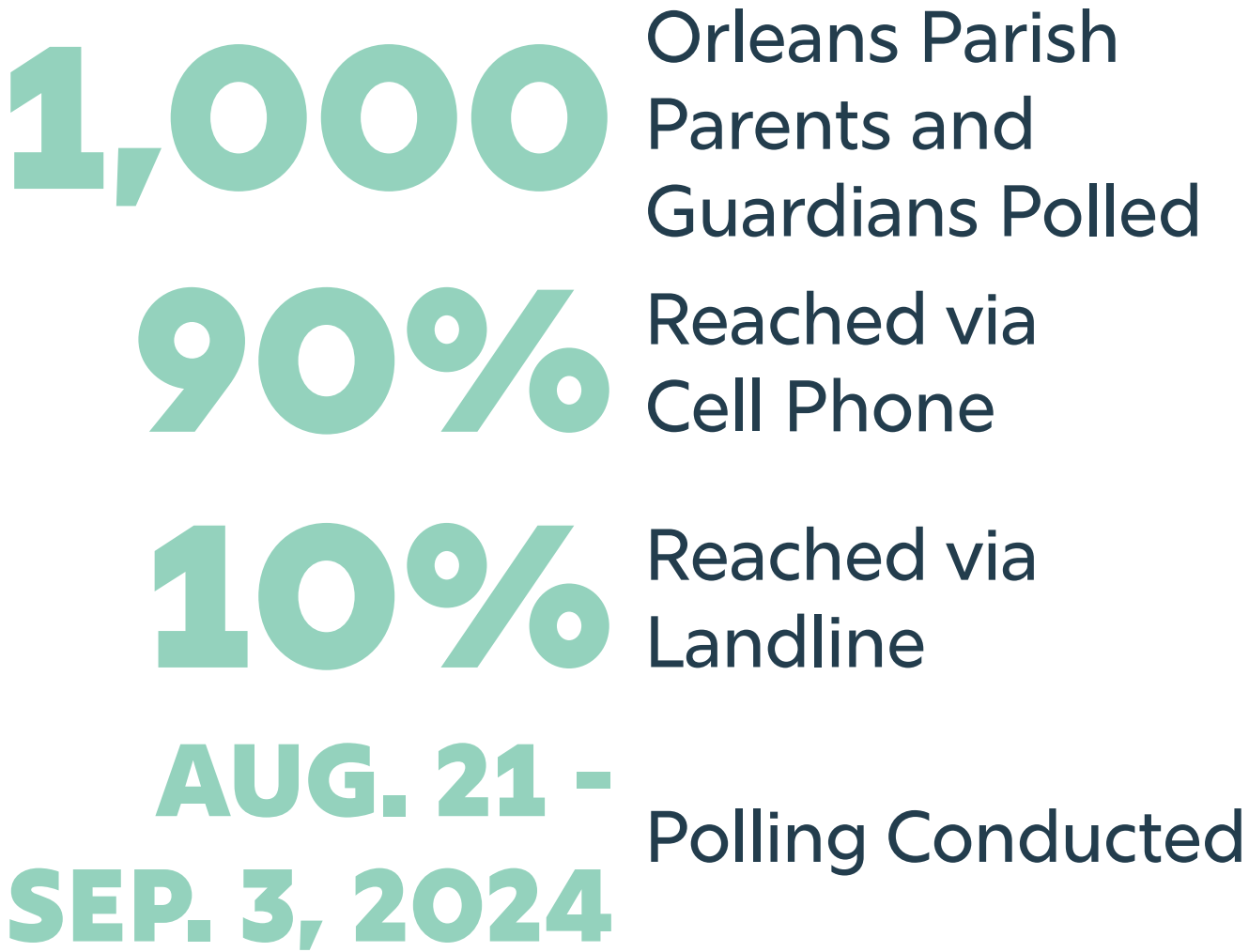
The Cowen Institute has conducted annual polls on perceptions of public education in New Orleans since 2007. Our polls are designed to provide insight into how parents, guardians, and the general public view New Orleans’ highly decentralized K-12 public education system. Each year, we include new questions about the most relevant and pressing issues facing educators and families. We also repeat questions from our previous polls to assess how opinions change over time on a few key topics.

This is the second of two briefs released in the 2024-2025 school year with results from polling conducted in the fall of 2024. We present the data in this way to make it more accessible for readers — the briefs allow us to group the findings by topic, enabling us to surface trends about particular areas of the city’s education system.

To capture the experiences and attitudes of a wide range of parents, as we have done since 2020, we polled 1,000 public and private school parents and guardians in Orleans Parish, as well as a small number who homeschool their children.

The topics covered in this brief include:

- Policy changes in schools
- FAFSA
- Postsecondary education
- High school courses
- Employment
- Life after high school



METHODOLOGY

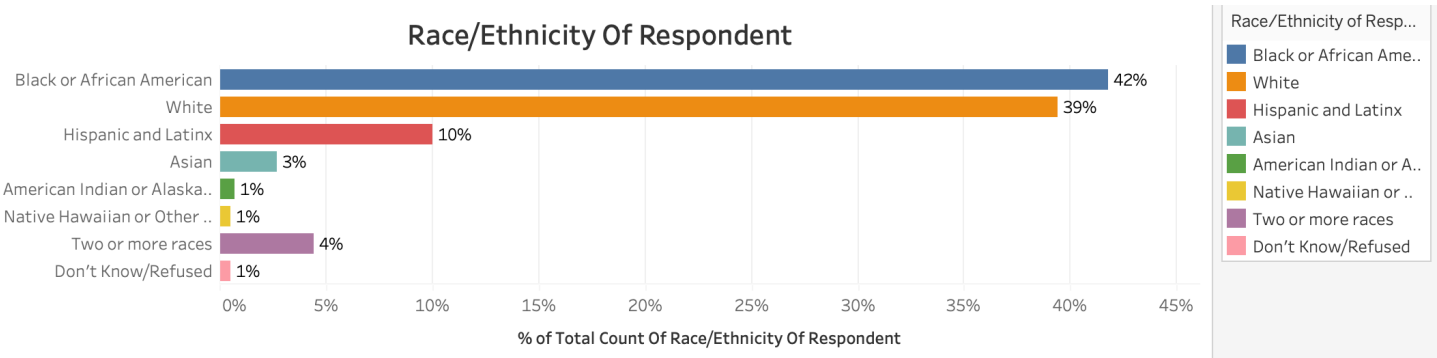
This is part two the 15th opinion poll on public education in New Orleans published by the Cowen Institute since 2007. The survey items were developed by the Cowen Institute in consultation with LJR Custom Strategies, a strategic research and consulting firm led by Principal Jennifer Johnson. LJR has led our polling over the past six years. Questions were created by the Cowen Institute in partnership with LJR and feedback from external stakeholders in the New Orleans education community.

This was a survey of 1,000 adults who reside in Orleans Parish and are the parent/guardian/responsible party for one or more children who currently reside in their household and attend a K through 12 school or are homeschooled. It was conducted from August 21-September 3, 2024 via landline and cell phone. The findings applying to the 1,000 sample are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 3.1%; subgroups of the sample are subject to error of up to plus or minus 10%. Please note that when percentages in responses do not add up to 100%, it is due to rounding.

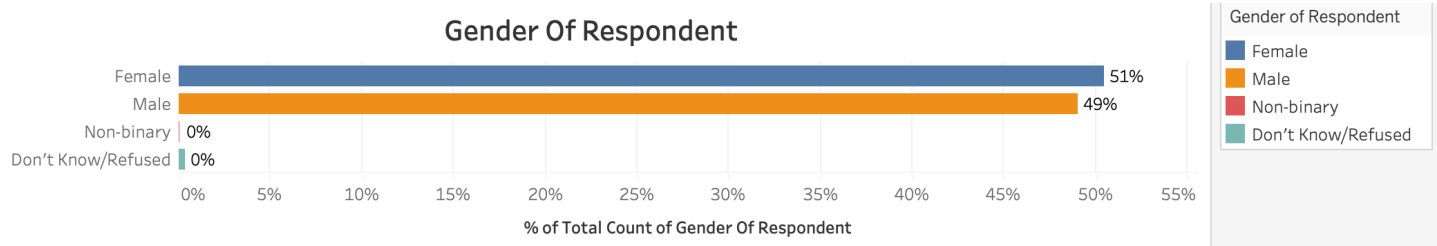
DEMOGRAPHICS

Of those polled, our respondents had the following characteristics:

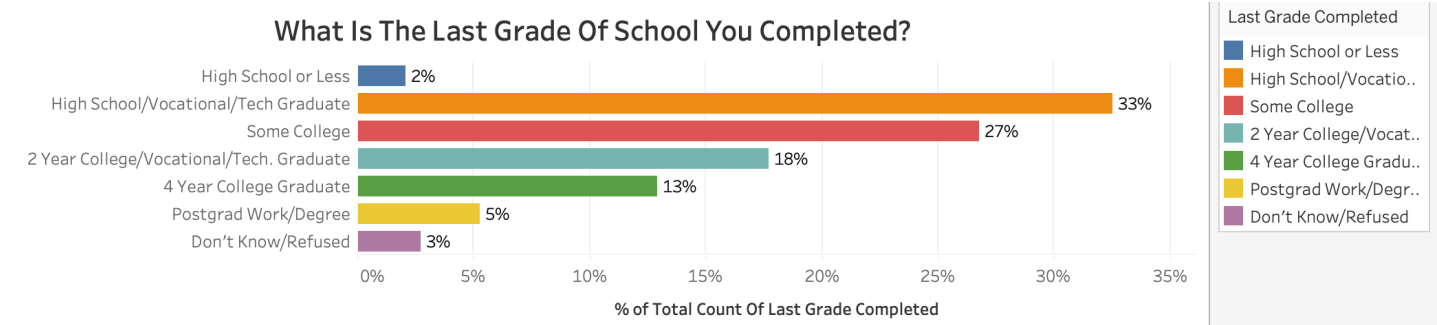
Race



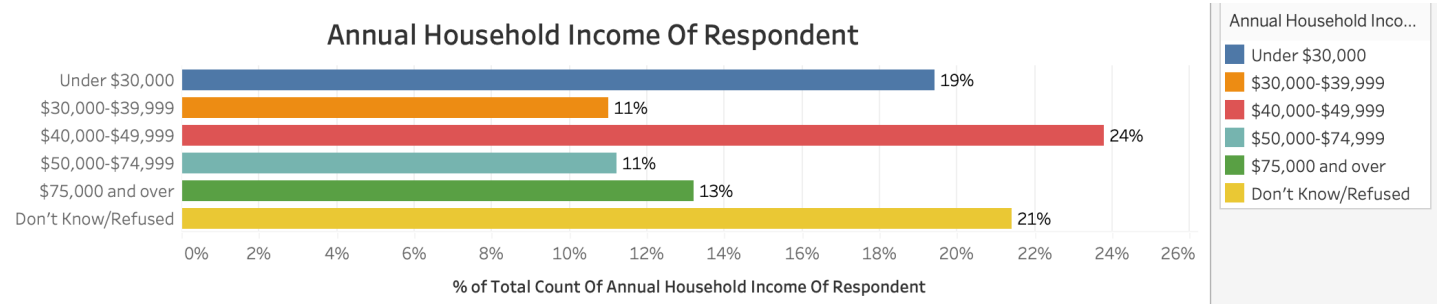
Gender



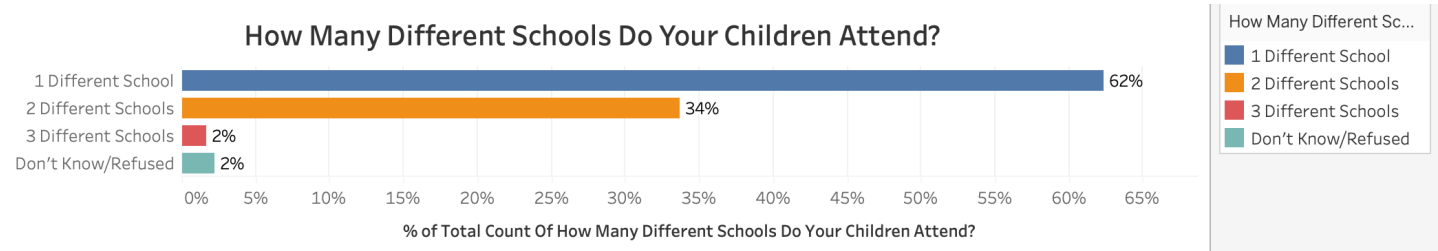
Educational Attainment



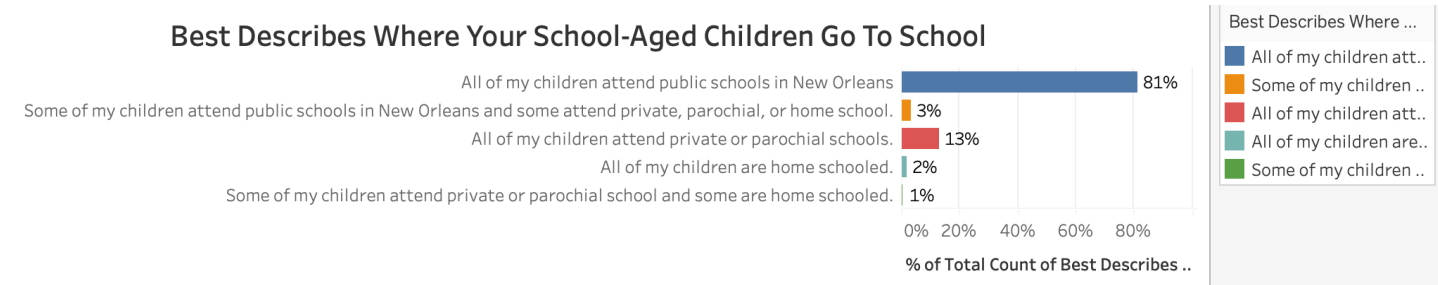
Household Income



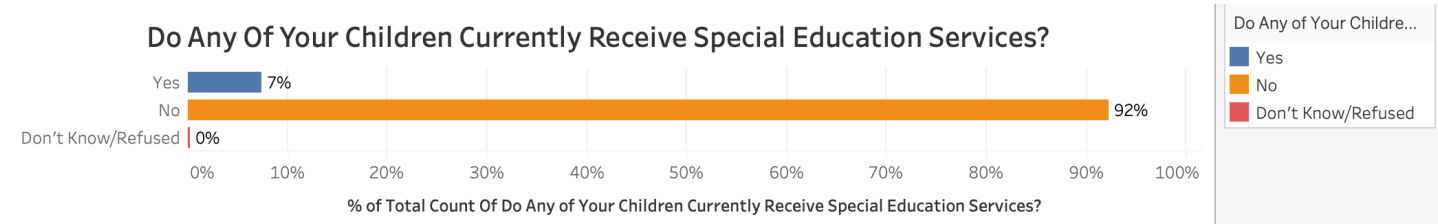
Number of Schools Children Currently Attend



Type of School



Special Education



KEY FINDINGS

Policy Issues

Direct run schools: A majority of respondents were in favor of New Orleans Public Schools' decision in 2024 to open and directly run a school for the first time since 2019.

Cell phone bans: We found that a large majority of parents and guardians favored the state's recent decision to ban cell phones in K-12 classrooms.

FAFSA requirement: A significant majority of respondents favored a policy requiring all high school students to fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in order to graduate. Louisiana had such a policy in place but overturned it this year.

Postsecondary Education

Postsecondary matriculation: We found that most respondents were not planning on their child(ren) attending a four-year university or college after graduating high school and those who did were unclear of how they planned to pay for it.

High School Courses

Coursework: A majority of respondents preferred that high schools offer career and technical education courses rather than AP or other advanced academic coursework.

Trends

Differences based on socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and race:

As we saw in the first brief we released on our 2024-2025 poll findings, the socioeconomic status, race, and educational attainment level of respondents mattered greatly in terms of how they answered questions. For instance, parents and guardians with higher levels of household income and who had graduated from four-year colleges were far more likely to state they had a child who planned to attend college and were saving for college. Wealthier respondents who had a child who was a recent high school graduate were also nearly twice as likely to state that that graduate was attending a four-year university than parents from lower socioeconomic tiers. These findings reinforce that income, education, and race greatly impact the way parents and guardians can access education resources in the city, and the educational and employment pathways their children pursue after graduating high school.



POLICY CHANGES

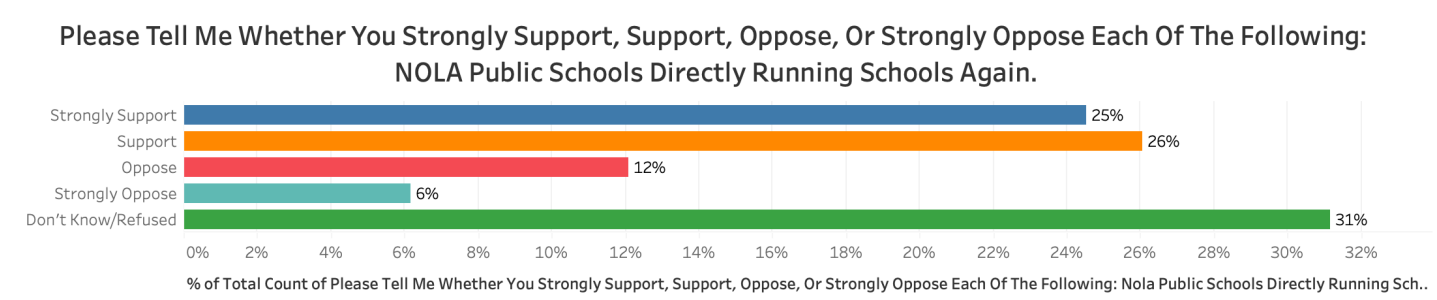
DIRECT RUN SCHOOLS

Please tell me whether you strongly support, support, oppose, or strongly oppose New Orleans Public Schools directly running schools again.

In August 2024, New Orleans Public Schools (NOLA-PS) opened its first traditional, district-run public school since 2019 — the Leah Chase School. In February 2024, the Orleans Parish School Board voted to open the school where Lafayette Academy previous operated. The Leah Chase School is not a charter school. Instead, NOLA-PS staffs and operates the school directly. By comparison, NOLA-PS is the authorizer or governing authority for the vast majority of charter schools in the city, meaning it grants the charters that allow those schools to operate, but does not have a say over how to run or staff the schools; charter operators make those decisions.¹

The decision to reopen a direct run school after being the nation’s first all charter school district was a monumental one. It could indicate a shift towards more direct run schools in the future. It also required to the district to shift resources to operating the school.

We asked parents and guardians how they felt about the change and NOLA-PS’s move to operate a school.² **We found that a majority, 51%, either strongly supported or supported NOLA-PS directly running schools again, while 18% opposed or strongly opposed the decision. However, it is important to note that 31% of respondents stated they didn’t know or refused to answer the question, which was one of the highest rates of any question we asked in the year’s polling.** Both parents and guardians of public and non-public school students had the same rates of support for NOLA-PS directly running schools.



¹ Fazio, Marie. “In ‘pivotal moment’ for New Orleans public education, Leah Chase School opens its doors,” NOLA.com, August 7, 2024. Link: https://www.nola.com/news/education/for-new-orleans-education-leah-chase-school-is-big-moment/article_1015Od7e-5414-11ef-a5cd-17552fb40822.html

² Note: Two months after our polling took place, in November 2024, NOLA-PS Superintendent Avis Williams announced her resignation following a \$36 million budget issue confronting the district and charter schools in the city. Respondents were thus not aware of the budget deficit or Williams’ resignation at the time polling took place. For further details, see: <https://thelensnola.org/2024/11/14/catastrophic-superintendent-resigns-amid-districts-36-million-gaffe/>

Subgroup Breakdown

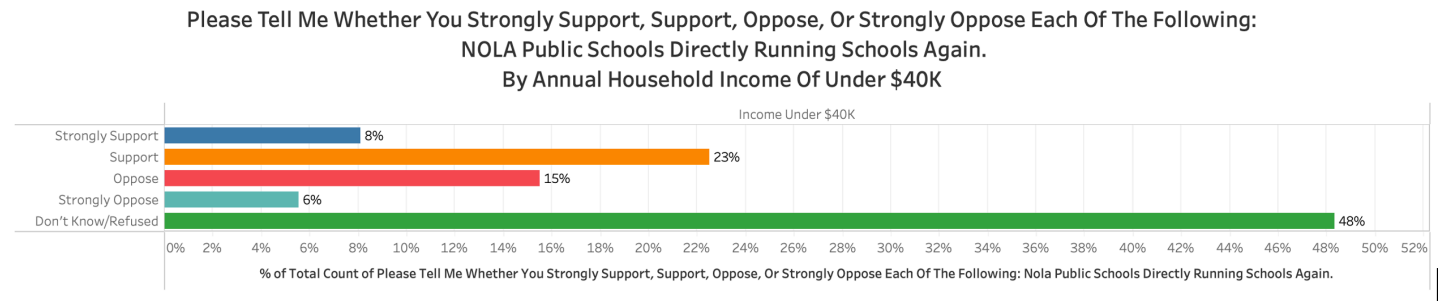
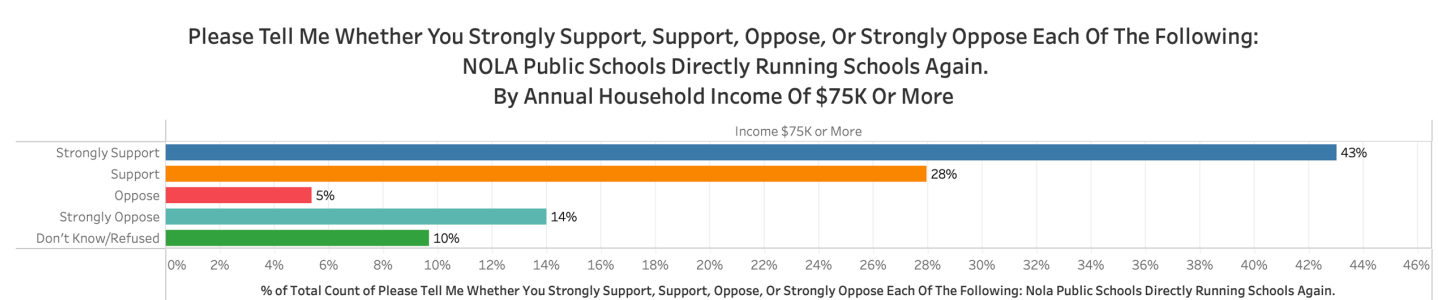
Child Plans to Attend College: Parents and guardians who stated they had a child who planned to attend college were significantly more likely to support NOLA-PS directly running schools (66% supported or strongly supported) than those who said their child(ren) would not attend college (48% supported or strongly supported).

Educational Attainment: Respondents who had graduated from college were twice as likely to support NOLA-PS directly running schools (76% supported or strongly supported) as respondents with a high school degree or less (38% supported or strongly supported).

Grade for NOLA-PS: Respondents who gave NOLA-PS a higher grade on its performance were more likely to support the district directly running schools. 82% of respondents who gave NOLA-PS an A or B grade supported the decision, while only 32% of respondents who gave NOLA-PS a D or F did so.

Race: Hispanic respondents were more likely to support NOLA-PS direct run schools (63% supported or strongly supported) than Black (45% supported or strongly supported) and White (49% supported or strongly supported) respondents.

Socioeconomic Status: Respondents making \$75,000 or more per year were more than twice as likely to support NOLA-PS direct run schools (71% supported or strongly supported) as respondents with household incomes under \$40,000 (31% supported or strongly supported).



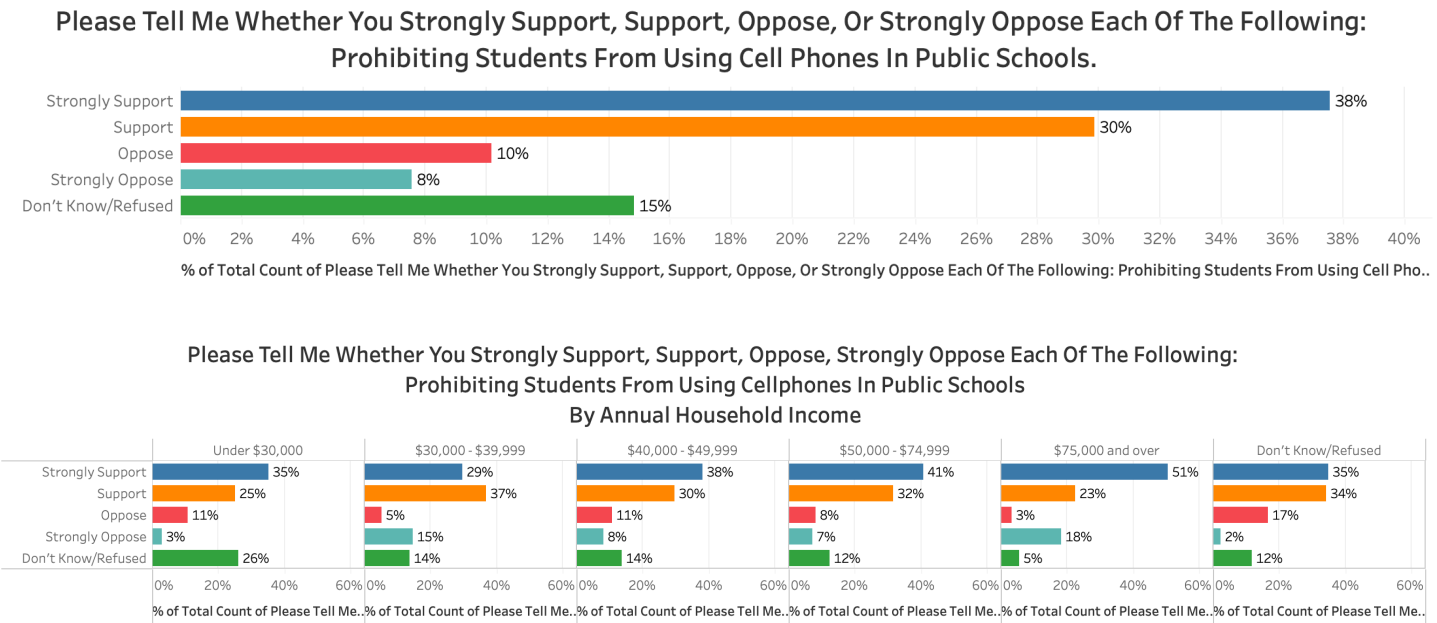
CELL PHONES

Please tell me whether you strongly support, support, oppose, or strongly oppose prohibiting students from using cell phones in public schools.

In 2024, the Louisiana Legislature passed a law targeted at limiting students’ use of cell phones while in school. The law specifically stated that phones and other electronic devices have to be “properly stowed away” or “prohibited from being turned on” while students are at school. However, the law left it up to each district (or charter management organization) to decide how to implement the new requirement, giving them discretion as to whether students could keep their shut-off phones in their backpacks or had to turn them into school staff at the beginning of the school day. Prior to the passage of the law, students could have their cell phones in school, but were not supposed to use them. However, according to news reports and the legislators who passed the ban, it was easy for many students to use their phones anyway. The intention of the law was to limit usage to help students avoid distractions and focus more on their school work and interactions with classmates and educators.¹

We wanted to assess parents’ and guardians’ reaction to the new law. **We found 68%, a supermajority of respondents who had a child in a New Orleans Public School, strongly supported or supported the new cell phone ban. Notably, at least 60% of respondents across all educational attainment, income, age, and race subgroups supported the law.**

¹ Carmosino, Elyse. “‘Kids are talking to each other.’ Teachers, students embrace Louisiana’s cell phone ban”, NOLA.com, October 9, 2024. Link: <https://tinyurl.com/38znn95z>.



FAFSA

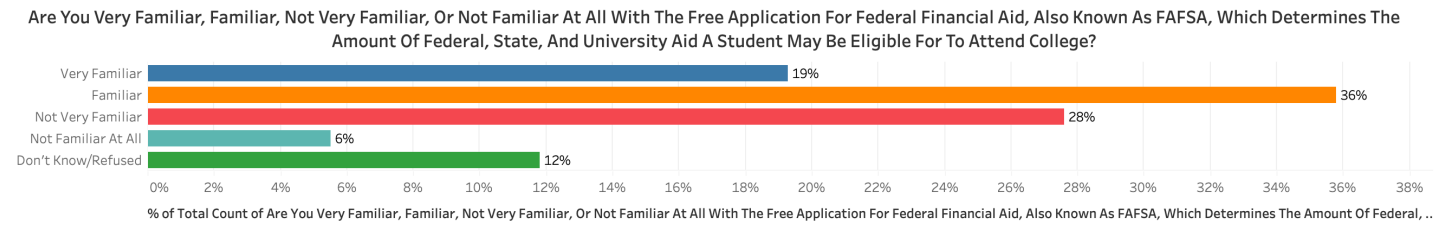
In 2018, the Louisiana Legislature implemented a policy that required all high school students to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in order to graduate. The goal of the requirement was to ensure as many Louisiana students as possible could qualify for federal financial assistance for postsecondary higher education institutions, such as Pell Grants. The policy immediately increased FAFSA completions in the state by 20%; in 2023, Louisiana led the nation in the percentage of high school students completing the FAFSA. Despite this increase in completions, in March 2024, the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education repealed the requirement, with state education officials citing privacy concerns as the reason.¹

The Cowen Institute had advocated for the original requirement and also objected to the removal of the requirement. We continue to support the FAFSA requirement as a way to enable more students from low-income backgrounds and first generation students to afford college.

Due to the importance of the issue, this year, we asked parents and guardians about their perceptions about FAFSA and the FAFSA requirement reversal. We asked two questions focusing on FAFSA and the FAFSA requirement.

FAFSA Question 1: Are you very familiar, familiar, not very familiar, or not familiar at all with The Free Application for Federal Financial Aid, also known as FAFSA, which determines the amount of federal, state, and university aid a student may be eligible for to attend college?

First, we asked a question to assess how familiar parents were with FAFSA overall. **Collectively, 55% of respondents stated they were very familiar or familiar with FAFSA, while 34% said they were not very familiar or not familiar at all. Notably, respondents without a student in New Orleans public schools were more likely to state they were very familiar or familiar with FAFSA (74%) than those who did have a public school student (52%).**



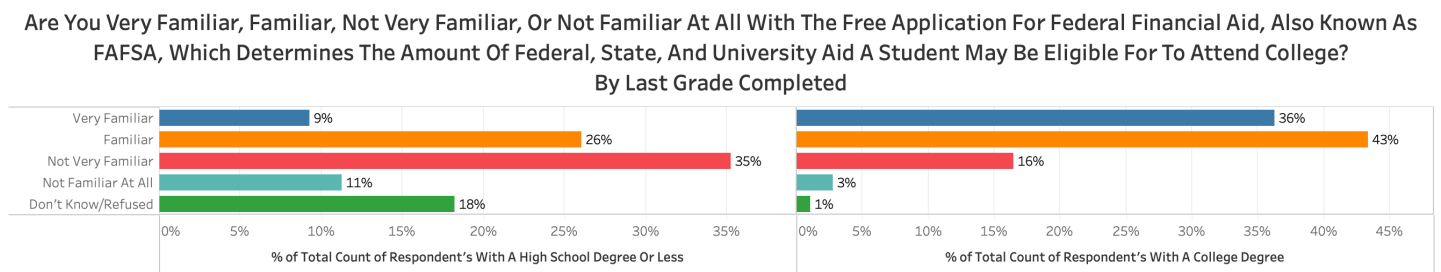
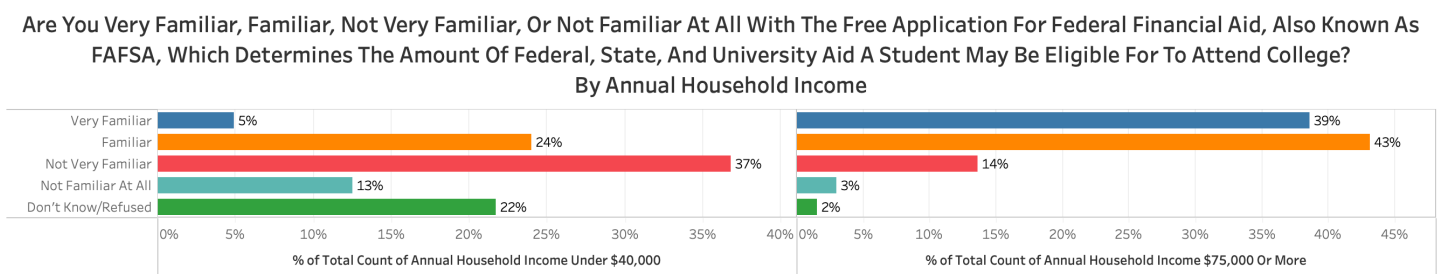
¹ Carrns, Ann. “Louisiana Will No Longer Require Students to Fill Out FAFSA to Graduate”, The New York Times, April 26, 2024. Link: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/26/your-money/fafsa-financial-aid-louisiana.html>.

Subgroup Breakdown

Age of Student in Household: Respondents with a student in high school were more likely to be very familiar or familiar with FAFSA (62%) compared to respondents with students in grades 6 to 8 (58%) or kindergarten through 5 (51%), and 80% of respondents with a recent high school graduate also expressed familiarity.

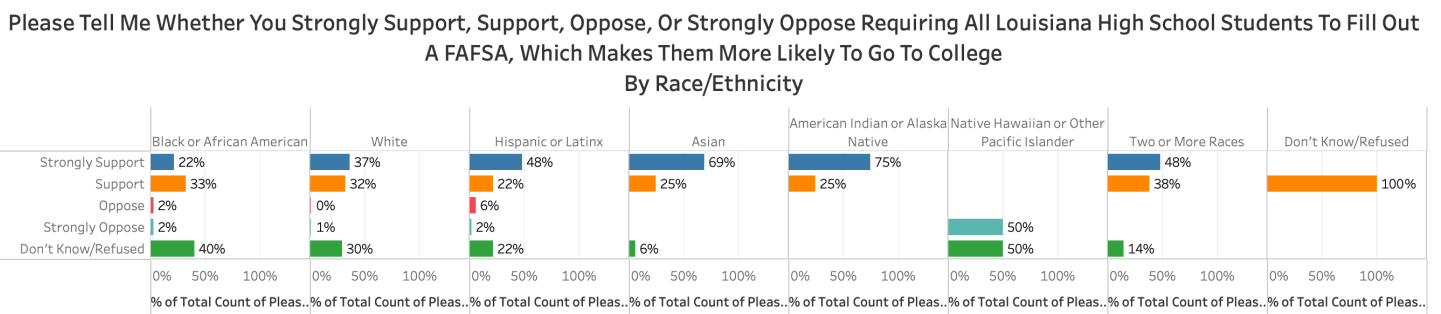
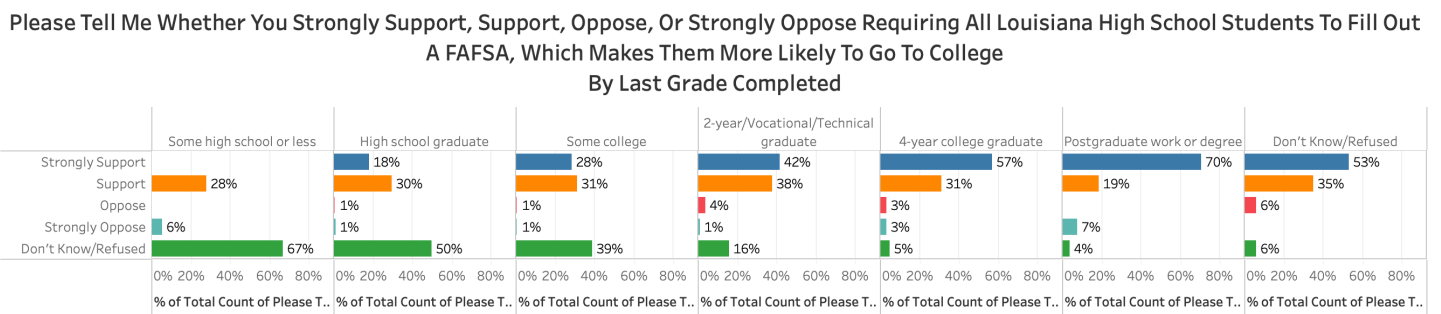
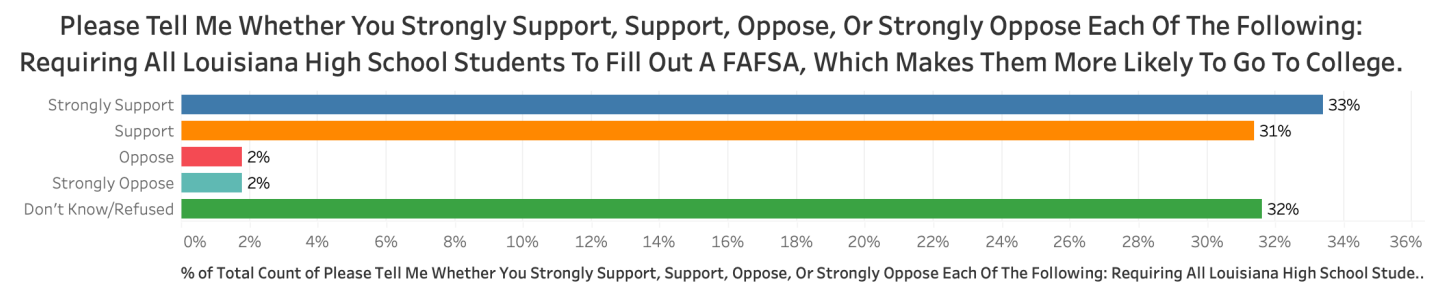
Educational Attainment: Just 35% of respondents with a high school degree or less said they were very familiar or familiar with FAFSA, compared to 79% of respondents with at least a college degree.

Socioeconomic Status: Highlighting a consistent trend in this year’s polling, wealthier families seem to have access to more information about important policies impacting their children’s education than lower income families. Nearly three times as many respondents from higher income households stated they were very familiar or familiar with FAFSA (82%) than those from lower income households (29%).



FAFSA Question 2: Please tell me whether you strongly support, support, oppose, or strongly oppose requiring all Louisiana high school students to fill out a FAFSA, which makes them more likely to go to college.

We saw overwhelming support for the FAFSA requirement amongst parents and guardians: A large majority of respondents, 64%, stated they either strongly supported or supported requiring all high school students in Louisiana to complete the FAFSA in order to graduate, while only 4% said they opposed or strongly opposed. A majority of respondents in nearly all demographic subgroups stated support for the requirement, with support especially high among respondents with a recent high school graduate (90%), those with a child that planned to attend college (96%), families with a special education student (84%), respondents with a college degree (88%), families making between \$40,000 and \$74,999 (68%) and those making \$75,000 or above (90%), and across all races (Black — 55%, White — 69%, Hispanic — 70%). The demographic subgroup with the lowest rates of support for the requirement were low-income respondents from households making under \$40,000, with just 36% expressing support. However, it is worth noting that just 4% of low-income respondents stated they opposed the requirement, while 60% said they didn’t know how to answer or refused to do so.



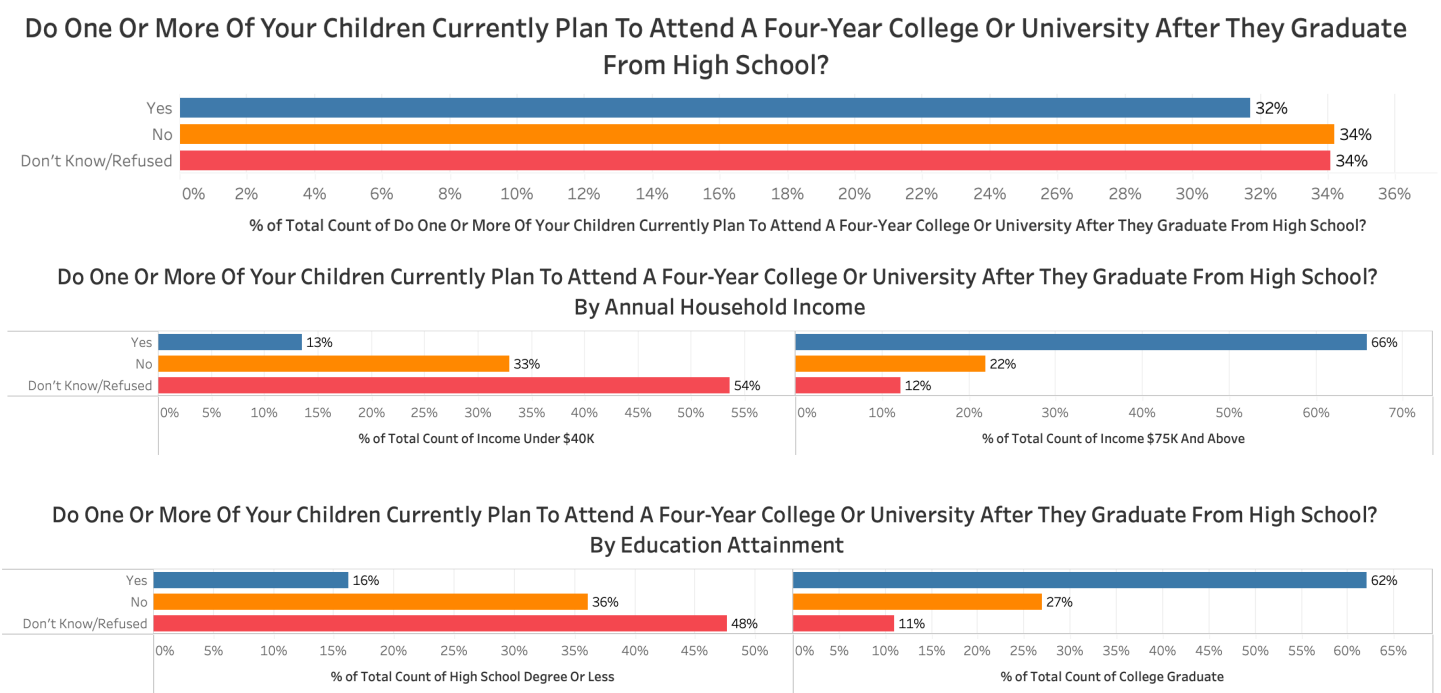
LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

COLLEGE MATRICULATION

Do one or more of your children currently plan to attend a four-year college or university after they graduate from high school?

We wanted to assess how many parents and guardians currently anticipated that their children would attend a four-year college or university after graduating high school. Research from the U.S. Department of Education and Georgetown University indicates that college graduates earn significantly more over the course of their lifetimes than individuals with only high school degrees; a postsecondary diploma can be a gateway to a more financially secure adulthood.¹

Only 32% of respondents stated they had a child who currently planned to attend a four-year college or university, while 34% said they did not. As with the responses to many of our other questions, the socioeconomic status and educational attainment of respondents mattered a great deal in how they answered this question. 66% of respondents earning \$75,000 or more stated they had a child who planned to attend a four-year college or university, compared to 13% of respondents earning under \$40,000. Additionally, 62% of respondents with a four-year college degree said their children intended to pursue this path, compared to 16% of respondents with a high school degree or less. More White (37%) and Hispanic (36%) respondents said their children were planning to attend a four-year program than Black respondents (23%).



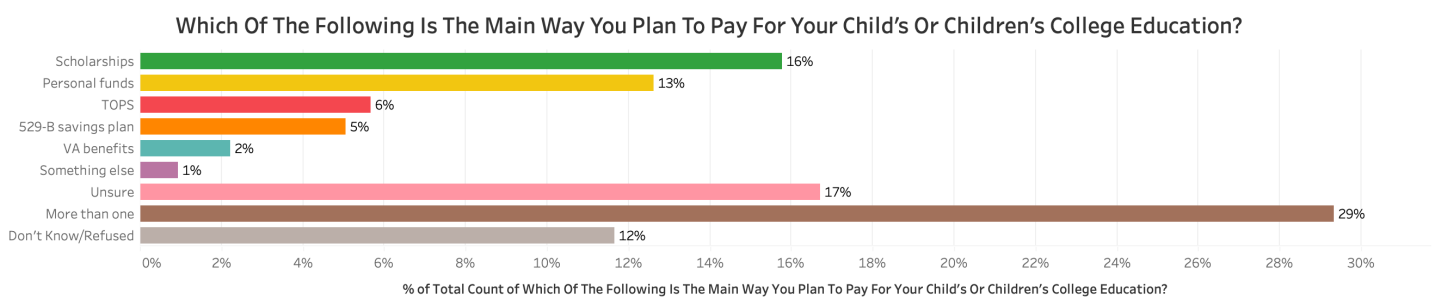
¹ Carnevale, Anthony P.; Rose, Stephen J.; and Cheah, Ban. *The College Payoff*, The Georgetown University Center On Education And The Workforce, 2011. Link: <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2011/collegepayoff.pdf>

EDUCATION SAVINGS

Which of the following is the main way you plan to pay for your child's or children's college education? (Options included: A 529-B college savings plan; TOPS; V-A benefits; Scholarships; Personal funds; Something else)

We asked a follow-up question of the 32% of respondents who stated they had a child who was currently planning to attend a four-year college or university — namely, how they intended to pay for that education.

A plurality of respondents, 29%, said they were planning to pay for their children's college education using a combination of the options we outlined in the question. The second most common answer was that respondents said they were unsure how they planned to pay for it at this time. For respondents who gave a single answer, 16% said scholarships, followed by 13% who named personal funds. Only 6% of respondents named TOPS.



Are you currently saving for your children’s postsecondary education?

College costs continue to rise in Louisiana and nationally. Part of the reason FAFSA completion is so vital is that it enables qualifying students to access federal aid that makes postsecondary education more affordable — which is especially important given these growing costs. We wanted to assess whether parents and guardians were saving for their children’s postsecondary education and if so, how.

Just 33% of respondents said they were saving for education after high school, compared to 55% who said they were not. Understandably, parents and guardians with a student in high school were the most likely to say they were saving compared to respondents with students in younger grades. Additionally, 76% of respondents who said they had a child who intended to go to college said they were currently saving, while 83% of parents who said their child was not planning to attend college said they were not saving. However, there were other significant differences in responses based on the demographic subgroups of respondents.

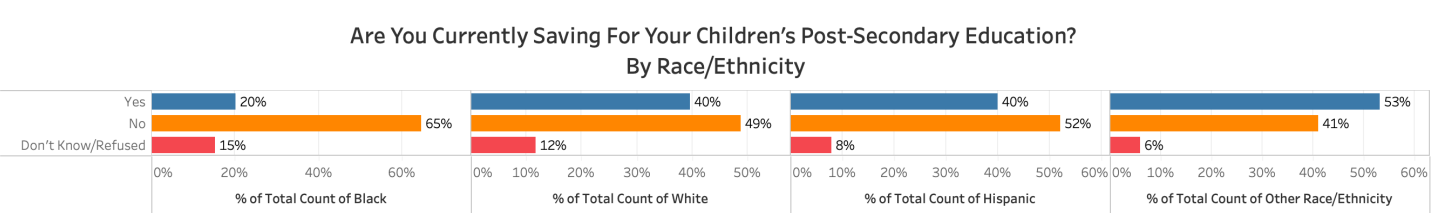
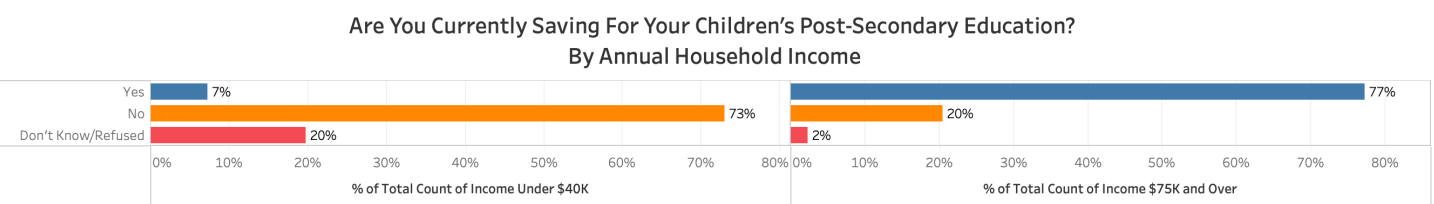
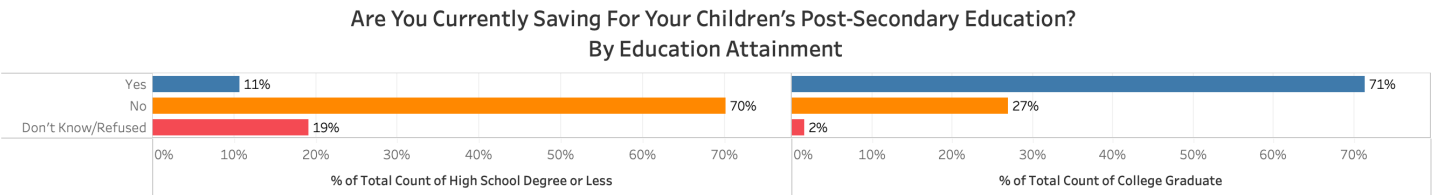
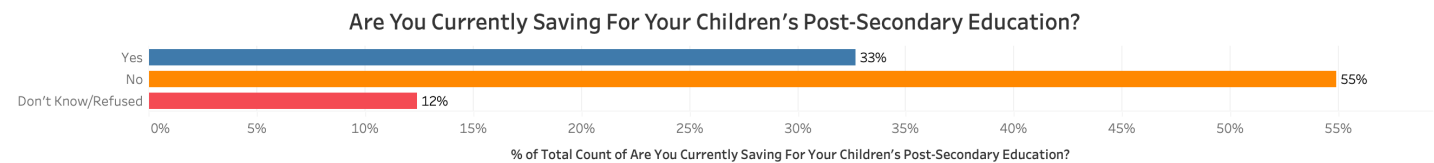
Subgroup Breakdown

Educational Attainment: College graduates were nearly seven times as likely (71%) to say they were saving for their children’s postsecondary education as respondents who had a high school degree or less (11%).

Public Versus Non-Public Students: A near majority, 48%, of respondents without any public school students said they were saving for postsecondary education compared to 30% of respondents with a student in public schools.

Race: Twice as many White (40%) and Hispanic (40%) respondents said they were saving for postsecondary education compared to Black respondents (20%).

Socioeconomic Status: Respondents making \$75,000 or more per year said they were saving for postsecondary education at eleven times the rate of respondents making under \$40,000 — 77% to 7%, respectively.



POST GRADUATION

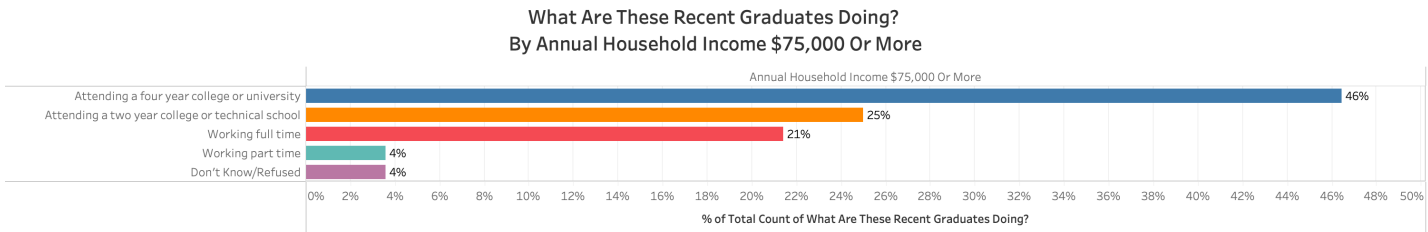
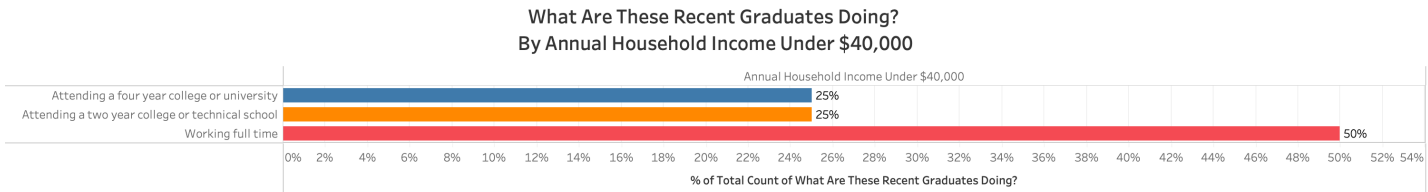
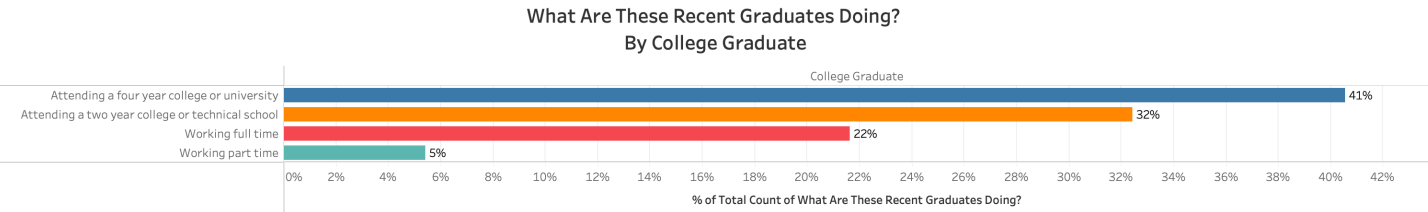
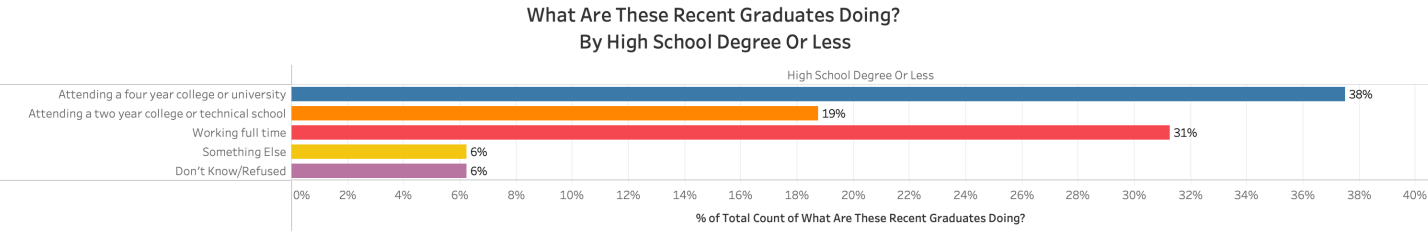
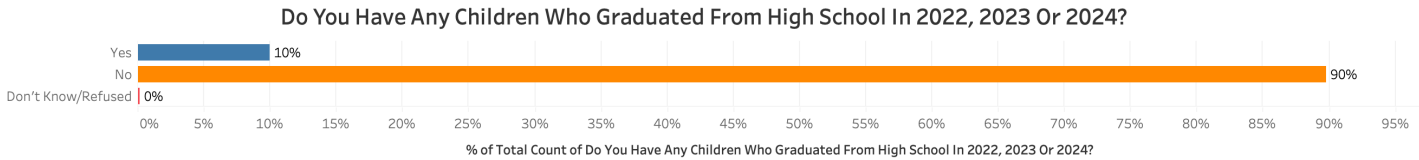
What are these recent graduates in your family currently doing? Are they attending a four-year college or university; attending a two year college or technical school; working full time; working part-time; looking for a job, or something else?

One of the core pillars of the work of the Cowen Institute is to examine whether New Orleans high school students are succeeding educationally and professionally once they graduate. This year, to help better understand the current outcomes for recent graduates, we asked parents and guardians who had a recent graduate in their household, what those young people were currently doing.

We found that 10% of all respondents who took the survey had at least one child who graduated in 2022, 2023, or 2024. 84% of these parents and guardians of a recent graduate said that their graduate still lived in New Orleans.

Of the 10% of all respondents who had a child who recently graduated high school, 33% said their child was attending a four-year college, while 24% said they were attending a two year college or vocational school. Additionally, 32% said their child was working full time, 27% said their graduate was working part-time, and 12% said they were looking for a job, while 2% said something else (note, total percentages exceed 100% because a student could be a current student at a postsecondary institution and employed).

Interestingly, the educational attainment of the respondent did not seem to make as much of a difference on this question as others in the survey. 41% of respondents who were college graduates said that their recent high school graduate child was currently attending a four-year college, which tracked closely to the 38% of respondents with a high school degree or less. However, household income did seem to matter – 46% of respondents from a household with income of \$75,000 or above said their recent graduate was currently attending a four-year college or university, compared to 25% of respondents with household incomes of less than \$40,000.



HIGH SCHOOL

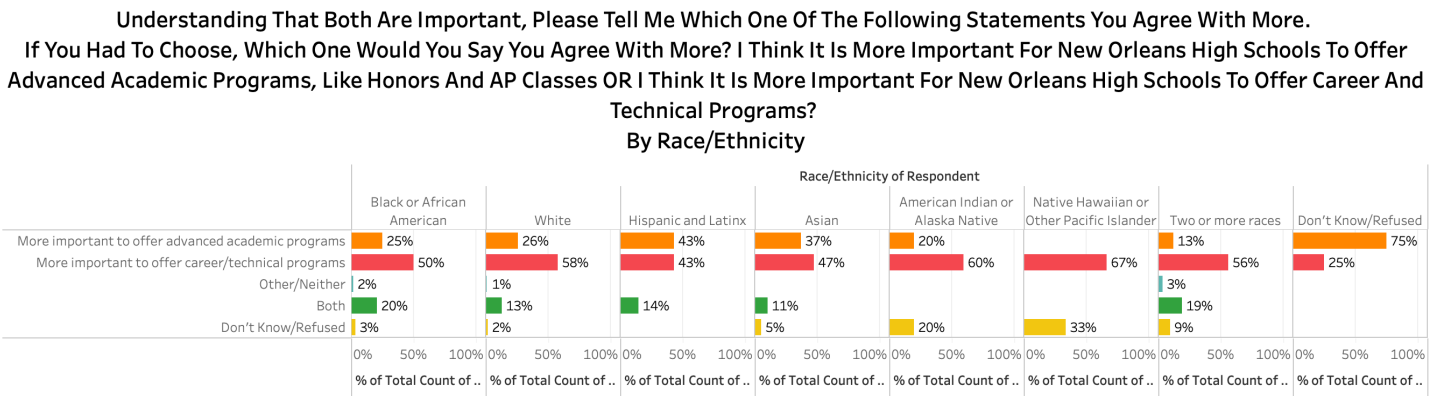
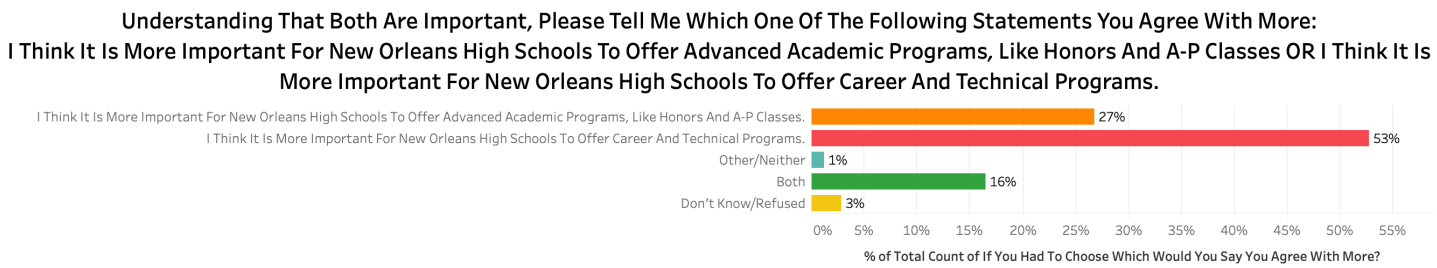
HIGH SCHOOL COURSES

Understanding that both are important, please tell me which one of the following statements you agree with more. If you had to choose, which one would you say you agree with more? I think it is more important for New Orleans high schools to offer advanced academic programs, like honors and AP classes OR I think it is more important for New Orleans high schools to offer career and technical programs?

High schools in New Orleans and across Louisiana are increasingly trying to integrate more Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses into their offerings for students. These courses allow students to learn technical skills while in high school that they can later use to find and keep employment in specific industries once they graduate. For instance, some courses offered in Louisiana include software coding, manufacturing, and the building trades.

In the past, we have asked parents and guardians whether they were in favor of New Orleans public schools offering CTE courses. We consistently found an overwhelmingly majority (greater than 80% of respondents) supported offering CTE coursework. This year, we wanted to get a better sense of whether respondents favored CTE course offerings when compared to AP and other advanced academic programs.

A majority of respondents (53%) said they favored New Orleans high schools offering CTE programs, which was nearly twice the rate who said they preferred AP and other academic programs (27%); 16% of respondents answered “both.” This suggests parents and guardians favor high schools offering coursework that more directly links high school students to specific career pathways after they graduate.



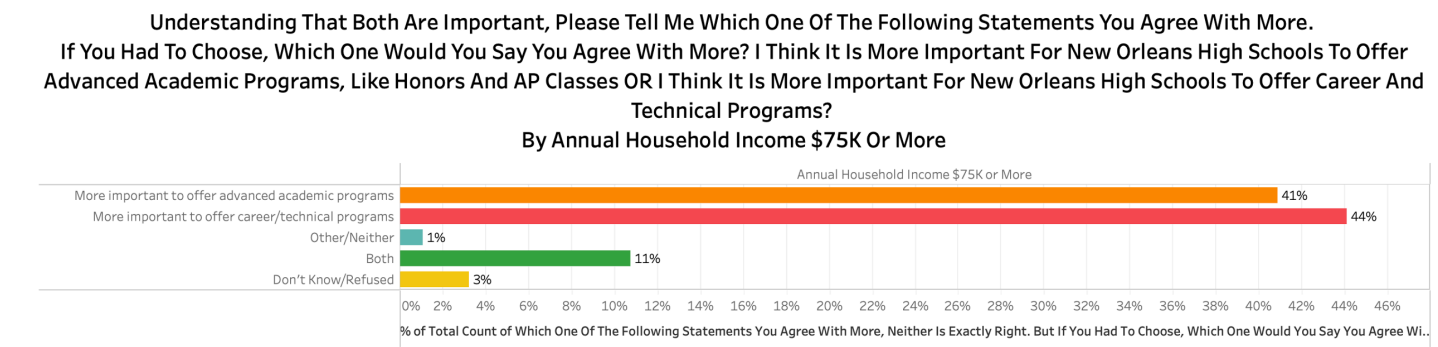
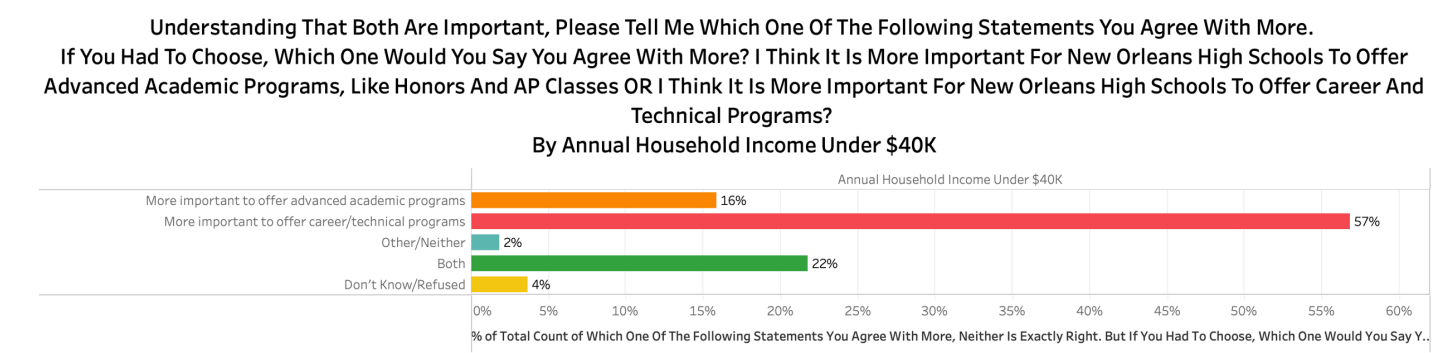
Subgroup Breakdown

Educational Attainment: A majority of respondents of all educational backgrounds said they preferred that high schools provided CTE offerings, including 50% of respondents with a college degree (35% of whom named academic offerings).

Income: The rate of respondents stating they wanted high schools to offer advanced academic coursework increased with income: 16% of respondents from families making under \$40,000 chose academic options compared to 41% of respondents making \$75,000 or above. The inverse trend was true for preferring CTE offerings, with 57% of those making under \$40,000 naming CTE, compared to 44% of those making \$75,000 or above.

Intent to Attend College: Respondents with a child who intends to attend college were nearly twice as likely to respond that they preferred high schools offering advanced academic coursework than those who said they didn’t intend for their child to attend college. Overall, 46% of respondents of children with college plans preferred academic coursework, while 44% named CTE offerings, compared to 25% of respondents of children without college plans who chose academic courses and 55% who selected CTE.

Race: Hispanic respondents were split in their preferences, with 43% preferring academic coursework and 43% preferring CTE offerings. Comparatively, majorities of both Black (50%) and White (58%) respondents preferred CTE course offerings (25% of Black and 26% of White respondents said they preferred academic coursework).



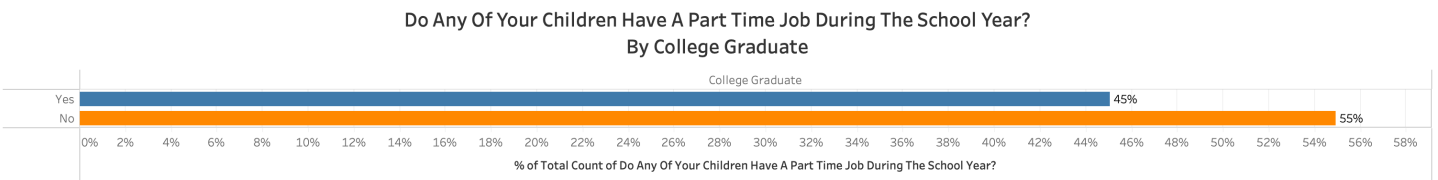
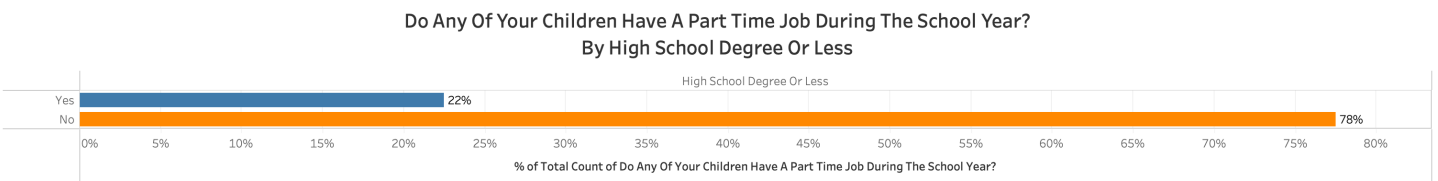
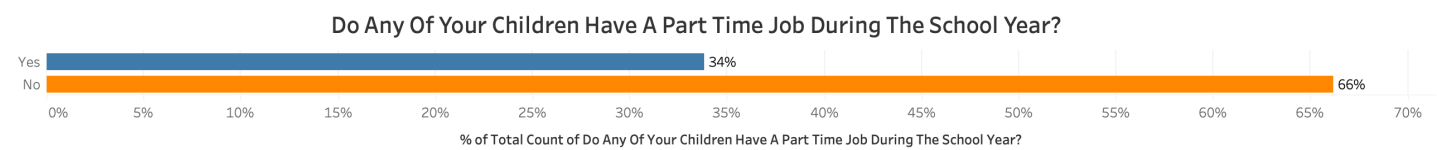
EMPLOYMENT

We wanted to assess how many families currently had a high school student who was employed part-time. We asked this question in order to get a sense of how many high school students were juggling both work and their education, as well as how many students were learning the important soft skills and accruing the social capital that working can provide. We then asked a follow-up question to respondents with a child who was currently employed to determine whether they believed working was helping or hindering their students’ academic performance.

Do any of your children have a part-time job during the school year? (Asked only of respondents with at least one student in the grade 10 or above in the household)

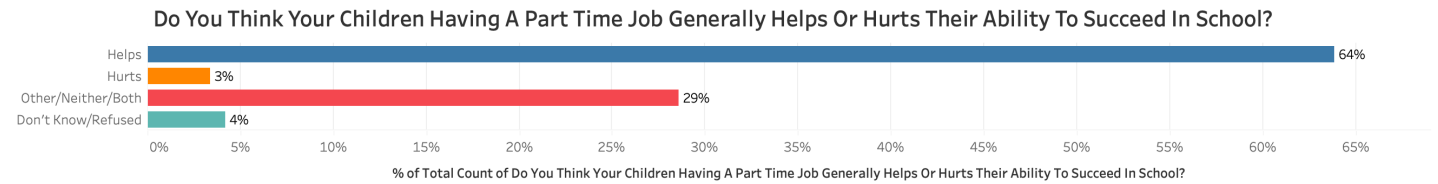
Only 34% of respondents with at least one student in grade 10 or above in their household reported that their child was currently employed, compared to 66% of respondents who said their high school student did not work.

Respondents from wealthier households and who had higher educational attainment were more likely to say they had a student who was currently employed: 45% of college graduates with a tenth grader or above said their child worked, compared to 22% of those with a high school degree or less; additionally, 38% of respondents with incomes of \$75,000 or above had a student who was employed, which was nearly five times the rate of the 8% of respondents with household incomes of less than \$40,000. Hispanic (38%) and White (35%) respondents were more likely to have a student who was employed than Black respondents (28%).



Do you think your children having a part-time job generally helps or hurts their ability to succeed in school?

By a wide margin, respondents thought working was beneficial for their student who was employed. 64% of parents and guardians with a working high school student said that having a part-time job helped their child, compared to just 3% who said it hurts (note: 29% said something other than that it helped or hurt).



CONCLUSION

This year's poll surfaces themes we have seen in previous years — namely, that the socioeconomic status, race, and educational level of parents greatly impacts how their children access educational opportunities in the city during their K-12 years and after. As shown in this brief, parents and guardians with higher levels of wealth and educational attainment were more likely to state they had children who either planned to attend a four-year college program or who already were. Additionally, those same subgroups of parents were more likely to save for postsecondary education than other respondents.

This brief, along with the first brief we published in November, highlight just how differently families can experience education in the city due to their backgrounds. Policies that promote equity and offer students and families opportunities, including access to postsecondary education, are vital to help level the playing field.





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To explore the data in greater depth and for interactive poll visuals,
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