



School of Education

---

# Challenges and Research Priorities of Louisiana Educators: A Survey of School Leaders

Eugene Kennedy, PhD

Richard A. Baker Jr., PhD

Office of Educational Research

March 11, 2020

View this report at the [LSU School of Education Website](#)

## Challenges and Research Priorities of Louisiana Educators: A Survey of School Leaders

### Key Findings:

- Louisiana schools suffer from a shortage of effective teachers and support staff
- Frequent curriculum changes, pressures from the accountability system, and low salaries lead many experienced teachers to leave the profession
- Changes in the student population, particularly decreasing valuation of schooling; increasing special needs, including mental health; and the lack of autonomy for educators make the work environment of educators difficult

### Executive Summary

This report presents results of a survey of school superintendents and principals in Louisiana. The survey was designed to identify challenges and research priorities of school leaders in the state. Respondents were asked to rank the importance of specific challenges in four areas (School Leaders, Teachers and Instructional Staff, Students, and Facilities and Resources) and to explain or comment on the nature of the challenge. More than half of Louisiana superintendents and more than one-quarter of principals responded to this survey. Noteworthy is that **54% of respondents served rural communities.**

School leaders identified the most significant challenge as unavailability of qualified personnel, specifically principals and teachers. Principals noted a significant shortage of effective personnel, especially certified educators. This shortage was attributed to a general decline in the number of candidates entering the teaching profession and to a variety of issues associated with teaching.

**They said that low pay, lack of autonomy, increasing high stakes accountability, mandated curriculum changes, and student related challenges encouraged experienced educators to leave the profession and discouraged prospective teachers from entering the profession.**

The result is that in many schools teachers have large classes, little autonomy, and a growing student population that increasingly brings mental health and other challenges that educators may not have been trained to address. In response, administrators are often left to hire inexperienced teachers, many of whom are graduates of alternative certification programs which rarely equip them with the pedagogical skills to be effective without significant support.

In addition to a shortage of effective teachers, administrators told of **financial challenges** with implications for support personnel, space, and frequently, of deteriorating physical facilities. These results raise questions about both the intrusiveness of state policies and their effectiveness, and of the ability of teacher preparation programs to produce a sufficient number of educators who are “ready” for the student population in the state. The results offer policymakers opportunities to improve the **learning environments and experiences** that students and educators face during the school day. Identifying policies which contribute to professionalizing education will address symptoms of the difficulties in recruiting and retaining diverse and well-prepared educators.

Policy areas identified in this research include improving curricular autonomy, high-stakes accountability demands, and responsiveness to changing student populations.

## Challenges and Research Priorities of Louisiana Educators: A Survey of School Leaders

### *Introduction*

#### Purpose of the Study

According to a recent article in US News and World report, Louisiana ranks very near the bottom in the US with respect to the quality of education offered to its citizens.<sup>1</sup> These rankings are based on a range of indicators, including student performance on standardized tests.

**For years the Gallop Poll ranks Louisiana’s K12 education system at or near the bottom. However, recent data show positive trends on some test scores. For example, Louisiana 8<sup>th</sup> graders have led the nation with regard to growth on the mathematics section of the National Assessment of Educational Performance.<sup>2</sup>**

Positive trends often reflect the investments policymakers have made in the State’s education system. Louisiana is a national leader with regard to the charter school movement, the creation of innovative pathways to teaching, the sophistication of its school and teacher accountability program, and its adoption and implementation of curriculum innovations, to name a few.<sup>3</sup> However, reviews on the impact of the State’s K12 initiatives have been mixed.<sup>4</sup> For example, a recent study of the Louisiana school choice voucher program raised questions about the effectiveness of the program and its impact on the education provided to low-income and minority youth.<sup>5</sup> A voice heard far too infrequently in these debates is that of the educators responsible for the day-to-day delivery of the State’s education.

Louisiana, like the rest of the country, needs well-prepared principals and educators. The need for quality educators is felt more strongly in rural districts.<sup>6</sup> Districts must invest time, effort, and resources to replace educators and ensure that there are certified professionals leading students. In 2016, this cost could range from \$4,400 in a rural district to \$18,000 in a large urban district.<sup>7</sup> Louisiana Department of Education reported 5,301 teachers exiting the classroom in 2017-18.<sup>8</sup> A reasonable estimate total cost to the State of Louisiana is approximately \$22 million. For this expenditure there is no noticeable improvement in student opportunities for equitable education.

---

## Challenges and Research Priorities of Louisiana Educators: A Survey of School Leaders

### *Introduction*

#### Methods

The study targeted all principals and superintendents in public schools in Louisiana during the Fall 2019 semester. Charter school principals were contacted based on the availability of their email. Email addresses for these administrators were obtained and electronic surveys were administered in October with a follow-up in early November.

The survey was developed based on a review of existing literature and discussions with retired school administrators, and university faculty responsible for training school leaders. The areas/categories included in the surveys were as follows: School Leaders (superintendents survey only), Teachers and Instructional Staff, Students, Facilities and Resources, and Other Challenges. In all but the Other Challenges category, respondents were asked to rank a list of topics based on their priority as a challenge in that category. Additionally, for each category, respondents were asked to provide comments related to their rankings and to provide a summary of their research priorities.

Rankings from the survey were tallied and are presented below in tabular format. Open-ended comments provided by respondents were analyzed by the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis using the SAS Enterprise Text Mining software.<sup>9</sup> These techniques allowed identification of major themes from the open-ended responses and a tabulation of the frequency with which these themes were addressed by respondents.

## Survey Respondents

Of the 65 superintendents who received the survey, 34 (52.3%) responded. Their average years of experience as a superintendent was 5.2 years, and all worked in public school districts. The type of districts represented by those who provided data on this item is as follows:

District Type	Frequency
Rural	16 (64%)
Suburban	6 (24%)
Urban	2 (8%)
Other (please describe)	1 (4%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

Of the 1,100 principals who received the survey, 289 (26.3%) responded. Of this number, 278 (98%) worked in public schools. The average years of experience was 6.61 years. With respect to the grade organization of the schools represented, the breakdown is as follows:

Type of School	Frequency
Elementary School	138 (49%)
Combination	67 (24%)
High School	42 (15%)
Middle School	34 (12%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>281</b>

## Survey Respondents Continued

With respect to the types of communities served, the breakdown is as follows:

District Type	Frequency
Rural	151 (54%)
Urban	60 (21%)
Suburban	58 (21%)
Other	12 (4%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>281</b>

## Challenges Related to Principals and School Leaders

Table 1.1 presents superintendent rankings of several issues related to principals and school leaders. The most important challenges address the **supply and recruitment of school leaders**. The principal accountability program and technology in the schools are the least pressing challenges identified by superintendents.

Table 1.1  
Challenges Related to Principals and School Leaders: Superintendent Rankings

	1 (Top Challenge) Pct N	2 Pct N	3 Pct N	4 Pct N	5 Pct N	6 Pct N	7 Pct N	8 (Least Pressing Challenge) Pct N	TOTAL
Leadership effectiveness of principals	18.18% 4	13.64% 3	22.73% 5	9.09% 2	18.18% 4	9.09% 2	9.09% 2	0.00% 0	22
Supply of qualified principals	18.75% 3	31.25% 5	6.25% 1	18.75% 3	12.50% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	12.50% 2	16
Technology in schools and classrooms	15.00% 3	0.00% 0	10.00% 2	5.00% 1	5.00% 1	5.00% 1	20.00% 4	40.00% 8	20
Recruitment of qualified principals	7.14% 1	7.14% 1	28.57% 4	7.14% 1	14.29% 2	14.29% 2	21.43% 3	0.00% 0	14
Retention of effective principals	5.88% 1	5.88% 1	5.88% 1	11.76% 2	11.76% 2	29.41% 5	23.53% 4	5.88% 1	17
Readiness levels of new principals	6.25% 1	31.25% 5	12.50% 2	31.25% 5	12.50% 2	0.00% 0	6.25% 1	0.00% 0	16
Principal evaluation and accountability program	5.88% 1	5.88% 1	11.76% 2	11.76% 2	11.76% 2	23.53% 4	11.76% 2	17.65% 3	17
Professional development for principals	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	25.00% 4	6.25% 1	18.18% 3	31.25% 5	6.25% 1	12.50% 2	16

## Challenges Related to Principals and School Leaders

Superintendents were asked to comment on the rankings they provided for school leaders (Table 1.2). They noted that principals are frequently taken away from instructional leadership, but that they are a key and pivotal player in educational processes. Included in the issue of their time are state mandates regarding observations and other activities. These superintendents also noted the difficulty of recruiting principals for rural schools.

**Table 1.2**

<b>Challenges Related to Principals and School Leaders: Superintendent Comments</b>
The challenges listed in the question are indicative of the primary issues we face.
It is very hard to encourage qualified, talented people to come to a rural district that is failing. Therefore as a district we must do something above and beyond what other districts are doing to train personnel.
Like teachers, it's difficult to retain qualified school leaders in rural school districts.
Our school district has many qualified principals. However, the nature of the job and challenging accountability limit the amount of time principals have to devote to instructional leadership.
Our district provides monthly PD for principals; however, a long-term mentorship--especially in the infancy of their careers--is desperately needed.
We have a shortage of people with experience who want to apply for principal positions. Many of the applicants have limited experience in the classroom and have not served as assistant principal. They have the qualifications but do not have much background experience.
Principals are THE most important members of the district. This, without a doubt, is why we've made so much growth in the last 4 years....Our principals are much stronger today than they were 5 years ago.
Too many other requirements outside the classroom take away from assisting teachers in the classroom. Evaluations do not cover all the areas required of teachers. Evaluations often are very time consuming and are not very effective in assisting the teacher to improve.



## Challenges Related to Principals and School Leaders

The views of superintendents are echoed by principals, who address demands on their time that take away from instructional leadership (see Table 5.1.2). Similarly, they note that accountability and other demands take away from the role of instructional leaders. Finally, they identify issues of support/coordination with district staff and the general lack of autonomy they and their teachers experience.

**Table 1.3**

<b>Research Priorities Related to Principals and School Leaders: Superintendent Views</b>
Additional professional development for administrators;
Use of the Dufour Model on Professional Learning Communities.
Principals' instructional knowledge of Tier I Curriculum and student performance.
Quality teacher feedback and in improving student performance;
Effectiveness Indicators Culture (building and sustaining a positive one);
Academic support to teachers;
Educational leaders are not managers of schools.

With regard to research priorities, superintendents identified the effectiveness of principals as an area of priority. This would entail effective professional development, assessment of curriculum knowledge, and school leadership styles.

**Summary:**

Based on the results from this survey, the issues superintendents face with regard to school leaders are as follows.

- The supply and recruitment of effective principals and readiness of new principals,
- The unintended consequences of mandates on principal autonomy and effectiveness, and
- A need for research on effectiveness of principals.

## Challenges Related to Teachers and Instructional Staff

Superintendent and principal rankings of challenges associated with teachers and instructional staff are presented in Tables 2.1.1 and 2.1.2. Both groups of leaders identify the supply and recruitment of qualified teachers as their greatest priorities in this category. These are followed by the readiness levels of new teachers and the overall issue of instructional effectiveness. Teacher accountability and technology in the classroom ranked among the least important challenges.

**Table 2.1.1**  
**Challenges Related to Teachers and Instructional Staff:**  
**Superintendent Rankings**

	1 (Top Challenge) Pct N	2 Pct N	3 Pct N	4 Pct N	5 Pct N	6 Pct N	7 Pct N	8 (Least Pressing Challenge) Pct N	TOTAL
Supply of qualified teachers	77.78% 14	0.00% 0	5.56% 1	5.56% 1	0.00% 0	11.11% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	18
Recruitment of qualified teachers	15.00% 3	50.00% 10	10.00% 2	10.00% 2	5.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10.00% 2	20
Instructional effectiveness of teachers	10.53% 2	15.79% 3	5.26% 1	21.05% 4	10.53% 2	15.79% 3	21.05% 4	0.00% 0	19
Readiness levels of new teachers	5.26% 1	10.53% 2	21.05% 4	36.84% 7	21.05% 4	5.26% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	19
Teacher evaluation and accountability program	5.56% 1	0.00% 0	11.11% 2	5.56% 1	16.67% 3	11.11% 2	27.78% 5	22.22% 4	18
Retention of effective teachers	0.00% 0	16.67% 3	38.89% 7	16.67% 3	11.11% 2	5.56% 1	11.11% 2	0.00% 0	18
Professional development for teachers	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11.76% 2	5.88% 1	23.53% 4	35.29% 6	11.76% 2	11.76% 2	17
Technology in classrooms	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10.53% 2	5.26% 1	5.26% 1	15.79% 3	26.32% 5	36.84% 7	19

## Challenges Related to Teachers and Instructional Staff

**Table 2.1.2**  
**Challenges with Respect to Teachers and Instructional Staff:**  
**Principal Rankings**

	1 (Most Important) Pct N	2 Pct N	3 Pct N	4 Pct N	5 Pct N	6 Pct N	7 Pct N	8 (Least Important) Pct N	TOTAL
Supply of qualified teachers	36.43 102	20.4 57	16.1 45	7.9 22	6.1 17	6.4 18	3.6 10	3.2 9	280
Instructional effectiveness of teachers	19.3 54	14.6 41	8.6 24	16.8 47	12.5 35	8.2 23	10.7 30	9.3 26	280
Readiness levels of new teachers	10.3 29	15.0 42	19.3 54	20.4 57	17.1 48	10.0 28	3.9 11	3.9 11	280
Teacher evaluation and accountability program	9.6 27	3.2 9	7.5 21	9.6 27	12.5 35	15.4 43	29.3 82	12.9 36	280
Recruitment of qualified teachers	7.5 21	28.9 81	20.0 56	14.6 41	8.6 24	7.1 20	8.9 25	4.3 12	280
Professional development for teachers	6.8 19	6.4 18	10.0 28	9.3 26	17.9 50	26.4 74	16.1 45	7.1 20	280
Technology in classrooms	5.7 16	2.9 8	3.6 10	3.6 10	7.9 22	11.1 31	18.2 51	47.1 132	280
Retention of effective teachers	4.2 12	8.6 24	15.0 42	17.9 50	17.5 49	15.4 43	9.3 26	12.1 34	280

## Challenges Related to Teachers and Instructional Staff

Superintendents note that recruiting teachers is the biggest challenge they face (Table 2.2.1). Their comments point to the production of teachers but also their ability to attract and retain new teachers. The result is many of under qualified persons in schools and a negative effect on the superintendents' ability to move forward with educational improvements.

**Table 2.2.1**

<b>Comments on Challenges Related to Teachers and Instructional Staff: Superintendents</b>
Teacher recruitment and retention are our greatest challenges.
We can't move forward academically when we don't have the teachers needed to make it happen.
With the increasing limitation of qualified teachers in our area, teachers leave at any point during the year, vacating positions with no qualified teachers to replace them.
My district has 25% uncertified teachers because of the lack of availability of certified ones. We severely compete with neighboring parishes who are able to provide higher salaries.
Due to the limited number of graduates from the college of education, there exists a shortage of new teachers.
...(due to our ability to pay).. this is EASILY our biggest challenge. The 2nd biggest challenge is nowhere near this one. We simply struggle to attract teachers. Plus, when we train beginning teachers, they leave us after 2 or 3 years to go to a higher paying parish.

## Challenges Related to Teachers and Instructional Staff

Principals' comments related to teachers and instructional staff are presented in Tables 2.2.2 (Teacher Performance Issues) and 2.2.3 (Teacher Supply Issues). Teacher performance issues are related to the readiness levels of new teachers, the ability and willingness of teachers to adapt to state mandated curriculum changes, and the general challenge of classroom management. Challenges with regard to the supply of teachers are related to the decline in the number of candidates entering the teaching profession, the quality of training offered by alternative certification programs, and the rate at which experienced teachers are leaving the profession. This latter challenge, according to principals, stems from pressures related to the accountability program, frequent mandates from the state, and demographic changes in student populations.

**Table 2.2.2**  
**Comments on Challenges Related to Teacher Performance Issues:**  
**Principals**

Category	Freq	Typical Comments
Changes in curriculum/instructional effectiveness	28 (13.9%)	Teachers overwhelmed by curriculum changes
Professional development for teachers	16 (7.9%)	Limited professional development time for teachers
Classroom management and discipline	13 (6.4%)	New and novice teachers are not ready for management demands of classroom
Teacher morale	8 (4.0%)	External mandates and student challenges lead to low teacher morale
Mindset of teachers	7 (3.5%)	Teachers unwilling or unable to adjust to curriculum changes
Technology in classrooms	6 (3.0%)	Unable to keep abreast of latest technology
Mentors for new teachers	6 (3.0%)	New teachers tend to be unprepared for the student population
Support staff and resource issues	5 (2.5%)	Limited support staff
Instructional effectiveness versus complacency	3 (1.5%)	Teachers work hard, but struggle with effectiveness
Total	92	

## Challenges Related to Teachers and Instructional Staff

**Table 2.2.3**  
**Comments on Challenges Related to Teacher Supply Issues:**  
**Principals**

Category	Freq	Typical Comments
Changes in curriculum/instructional effectiveness	28 (13.9%)	Teachers overwhelmed by curriculum changes
Professional development for teachers	16 (7.9%)	Limited professional development time for teachers
Classroom management and discipline	13 (6.4%)	New and novice teachers are not ready for management demands of classroom
Teacher morale	8 (4.0%)	External mandates and student challenges lead to low teacher morale
Mindset of teachers	7 (3.5%)	Teachers unwilling or unable to adjust to curriculum changes
Technology in classrooms	6 (3.0%)	Unable to keep abreast of latest technology
Mentors for new teachers	6 (3.0%)	New teachers tend to be unprepared for the student population
Support staff and resource issues	5 (2.5%)	Limited support staff
Instructional effectiveness versus complacency	3 (1.5%)	Teachers work hard, but struggle with effectiveness
Total	92	

## Challenges Related to Teachers and Instructional Staff

Superintendent responses to research priorities in this category addressed teacher recruitment and retention, implementation of state-mandated curriculum, and ability to instruct students with special needs (Table 2.3.1).

**Table 2.3.1**

<b>Research Priorities Related to Teachers and Instructional Staff: Superintendents</b>
Fidelity to Tier I Curriculum and student performance.
Strategies that work to help SPED students perform on the state test.
Sustainability, fewer college students pursuing education degrees; attracting new teachers and retaining them.
Retaining teachers and preparing teachers to deal with classroom management.

## Challenges Related to Teachers and Instructional Staff

Principals’ responses regarding research priorities for teachers and instructional staff were coded into five categories (Table 2.3.2). The most prominent category is research related to teacher instructional effectiveness. Items addressed in this category include differentiating instruction, data use, motivating students, research-based strategies, etc. The next most prominent category is related to professional development for teachers. Comments in this category addressed the effectiveness of PD and training needs.

**Table 2.3.2 Research Priorities Related to Teachers and Instructional Staff: Superintendents**

Category	Freq	Typical Comments
Effective instruction	49 (44.1%)	Factors that contribute to teacher effectiveness
Professional development	26 (23.4%)	Effectiveness of professional development, training, and mentoring
Other	14 (12.6%)	The influence of technology, student engagement, etc.
Teacher recruitment and retention	11 (9.9%)	Effective strategies for recruiting and retaining teachers
State policies for curriculum and teacher accountability	11 (9.9%)	Impact of curriculum changes and accountability on educational processes
Total	111	

### Summary

*Principals and superintendents both identify the supply of qualified educators as a major challenge. This is related to the overall decline in enrollment rates in teacher preparation programs, but also connected to the work environment for professional educators.*

*Administrators describe an environment in which principals have decreasing autonomy with respect to curriculum, ever increasing high-stakes accountability demands, and significant changes in student populations.*

*These factors lead to increasing levels of job dissatisfaction and problems with both recruitment and retention of effective educators.*



## Challenges Related to Students

Superintendents (Table 3.1.1) ranked student academic achievement as the number one challenge they face in this category. Student accountability was also identified as a significant challenge. Principals ranked student academic achievement as the number one priority but also ranked discipline, attendance, engagement, and accountability as being areas of significant challenge (Table 3.1.2).

**Table 3.1.1**  
**Challenges Related to Students:**  
**Superintendent Rankings**

	1 (Top Challenge) Pct N	2 Pct N	3 Pct N	4 Pct N	5 Pct N	6 Pct N	7 (Least Pressing Challenge) Pct N	TOTAL
Student academic achievement	60.00% 12	15.00% 3	0.00% 0	5.00% 1	5.00% 1	5.00% 1	10.00% 2	20
Student accountability program	22.22% 4	22.22% 4	5.56% 1	5.56% 1	11.11% 2	16.67% 3	16.67% 3	18
Student discipline	10.00% 2	25.00% 5	30.00% 6	25.00% 5	0.00% 0	10.00% 2	0.00% 0	20
Student mobility	5.26% 1	5.26% 1	5.26% 1	15.79% 3	36.84% 7	10.53% 2	21.05% 4	19
Student engagement	5.00% 1	15.00% 3	25.00% 5	35.00% 7	10.00% 2	10.00% 2	0.00% 0	20
Student attendance	0.00% 0	21.05% 4	21.05% 4	10.53% 2	26.32% 5	10.53% 2	10.53% 2	19
Student health	0.00% 0	10.53% 2	15.79% 3	5.26% 1	0.00% 0	36.84% 7	31.58% 6	19

## Challenges Related to Students

**Table 3.1.2**  
**Challenges with Respect to Students: Principal Rankings**

	1 (Most Important) Pct N	2 Pct N	3 Pct N	4 Pct N	5 Pct N	6 Pct N	7 (Least Important) Pct N	TOTAL
Student Academic Achievement	34.78% 96	25.36% 70	19.57% 54	9.78% 27	5.80% 16	2.90% 8	1.81% 5	276
Student Discipline	16.67% 46	18.12% 50	19.57% 54	17.75% 49	16.30% 45	6.16% 17	5.43% 15	276
Student Attendance	20.29% 56	13.77% 38	18.12% 50	20.29% 56	18.12% 50	6.52% 18	2.90% 8	276
Student Mobility	2.90% 8	5.80% 16	5.43% 15	10.87% 30	19.57% 54	36.59% 101	18.84% 52	276
Student Health	3.62% 10	4.35% 12	2.17% 6	7.25% 20	14.13% 39	28.26% 78	40.22% 111	276
Student Engagement	9.42% 26	19.57% 54	22.46% 62	18.12% 50	11.23% 31	10.87% 30	8.33% 23	276
Student Accountability Program	12.32% 34	13.04% 36	12.68% 35	15.94% 44	14.86% 41	8.70% 24	22.46% 62	276

Superintendents stated that the value placed by students and parents on education is a significant challenge (Table 3.2.1). Among principals, the most comments in this category related to student and parent engagement (Table 3.2.2). Coupled with changes in demographics, administrators indicated significant issues with engagement of students and parents. These issues manifested themselves in attendance problems, behavior problems, etc. Related to this is a significant increase in mental health issues among students, and state policies which focus largely on test scores, with little accountability for parents and students.

**Table 3.2.1**

Comments on Challenges Related to Students: Superintendents
A culture of very low expectations.
The accountability system is not designed for small school districts with a majority of minority students. It is inequitable.
Violence from home and community brought into the school by students at the high school level. This is a high priority issue that is faced primarily by 3 schools.

## Challenges Related to Students

**Table 3.2.2**  
**Comments on Challenges Related to Students:**  
**Principals**

Category	Freq	Typical Comments
Student and parent engagement and accountability	50 (41.7%)	Parents and students do not value education and show limited engagement, coupled with limited accountability
Fairness, impact of accountability, state policies	25 (20.8%)	State accountability, discipline, and finance policies have adverse impact on educational processes
Mental health, emotional needs of students	25 (20.8%)	Significant change in numbers of students having mental health challenges
Student behavior and discipline	9 (7.5%)	Increased discipline challenges related to mental health and changing demographics
Student learning needs, readiness	7 (5.8%)	Students with limited grade level readiness
Changing student demographics	4 (3.3%)	Significant changes in student demographics produce challenges for school staff and resources
Total	120	

Superintendents identified the impact of accountability and discipline policies on minority and economically disadvantaged students as being areas of research interest (Table 3.3.1). Principals identified student mental health, behavior, engagement, and motivation as being key challenges and priorities for research (Table 3.3.2). Their comments represented a desire to know which strategies worked best to address problems in these areas. Additionally, respondents expressed a desire for research related to issues of instructional effectiveness for a diverse and highly mobile student population, where engagement and attendance are issues.

**Table 3.3.1**

Research Priority for Challenges Related to Students: Superintendents
Student discipline as it relates to the economically disadvantaged.
Research on the effects of the accountability system on minority students.
Can economically disadvantaged students catch up if exposed to quality early childhood education were provided?
Effectiveness of mentor programs on middle/high school students from in economically disadvantaged situations.

## Challenges Related to Students

**Table 3.3.2**  
**Research Priorities Related to Student Challenges:**  
**Principals**

Category	Freq	Typical Comments
Student engagement, motivation	17 (18.7%)	Effective strategies for motivating and engaging students
Student mental health, behavior	17 (18.7%)	Effective strategies for dealing with student mental health issues
Instructional effectiveness strategies	15 (16.5%)	Effectiveness of strategies designed to improve student achievement
Effects of transience, attendance	10 (11.0%)	Effects of student mobility and attendance
Meeting student academic needs	9 (9.9%)	Providing appropriate instruction to students
Other	8 (8.8%)	Communication, graduate rates, etc.
Parent engagement	4 (4.4%)	Strategies for addressing parent apathy and disengagement
Accountability	4 (4.4%)	Unintended stress related to accountability
Effectiveness of curriculum	4 (4.4%)	The effectiveness and appropriateness of the curriculum
Data use	3 (3.3%)	Effective use of data
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	

### Summary

*Principals and superintendents note that students are increasingly showing evidence of mental health issues and family environments in which education is not valued.*

*This results in problems related to attendance, behavior, and engagement.*

*Teachers are not prepared to address these evolving challenges and the result is a disruption to educational processes.*

## Challenges Related to Physical Facilities and Resources

Both superintendents and principals rank finances and physical facilities as significant challenges (Tables 4.1.1 and 4.1.2). These are followed closely by issues of support staff and space.

**Table 4.1.1**  
**Challenges Related to Physical Facilities and Resources:**  
**Superintendent Rankings**

	1 (Most Important) Pct N	2 Pct N	3 Pct N	4 Pct N	5 (Least Important) Pct N	TOTAL
Finances	59.09% 13	27.27% 6	4.55% 1	0.00% 0	9.09% 2	22
Deterioration of physical facilities	13.64% 3	45.45% 10	4.55% 1	18.18% 4	18.18% 4	22
Lack of adequate space	13.64% 3	0.00% 0	18.18% 4	27.27% 6	40.91% 9	22
Support staff	9.52% 2	19.05% 4	38.10% 8	23.81% 5	9.52% 2	21
Materials and supplies	5.00% 1	10.00% 2	35.00% 7	30.00% 6	20.00% 4	20

**Table 4.1.2**  
**Challenges with Respect to Physical Facility and Resources:**  
**Principal Rankings**

	1 (Most Important) Pct N	2 Pct N	3 Pct N	4 Pct N	5 (Least Important) Pct N	TOTAL
Deterioration of physical facilities	28.03% 74	20.08% 53	12.12% 32	14.39% 38	25.38% 67	264
Finances	26.52% 70	26.89% 71	17.80% 47	14.02% 37	14.77% 39	264
Support staff	22.73% 60	18.94% 50	21.97% 58	15.15% 40	21.21% 56	264
Lack of adequate space	16.29% 43	15.15% 40	20.45% 54	22.35% 59	25.76% 68	264
Materials and supplies	6.44% 17	18.94% 50	27.65% 73	34.09% 90	12.88% 34	264

## Challenges Related to Physical Facilities and Resources

The most frequent comments in this section address resource updates and maintenance of physical facilities. Respondents noted that many of the school buildings are old, and their maintenance issues were a strain on budgets. Respondents also noted the need for additional space, staff, and Instructional upgrades, including technology (see Tables 4.2.1 and 4.2.2).

**Table 4.2.1**

Comments on Challenges Related to Physical Facilities and Instructional Resources: Superintendents
The campuses are nearly 70 years old on average. The day will soon come that buildings will simply wear out. At present, the community would not likely support a tax referendum.
State and local funding are not sufficient to maintain physical facilities as well as keep up with the high demands of accountability, including the need for constant updating of technology.

**Table 4.2.2**

**Comments on Challenges Related to Facilities and Resources:  
Principals**

Category	Freq	Typical Comments
Updates, maintenance of physical facilities	39 (36.8%)	Our building is more than 50 years old We have many unmet repair and maintenance issues
Finances for staff and instructional improvements	24 (22.6%)	We need additional staff to meet the needs of our growing and changing population
Funds for technology upgrades	10 (9.4%)	Funds are needed to reach one computer to one student ratio
Facilities, district support not a great area of need	10 (9.4%)	Our district provides the support we need in this area
School & class size, space issues	9 (8.5%)	We need additional space Our enrollments have increased
General need for funds in education	9 (8.5%)	Funds make it possible to hire needed staff
Upgrades to gym	3 (2.8%)	Our gym is too small for our population
Rural school finance issues	2 (1.9%)	Our rural school has a small tax base
Total	106	

## Challenges Related to Physical Facilities and Resources

The most common response to research priorities in this category by principals (no response from superintendents) addressed funding for physical improvements (Table 4.3.1). Other responses addressed the need for research related to the link of physical facilities and educational processes, strategies for raising funds, and funding equity issues. A theme running through the responses was the possible links among the physical condition of the school, staff shortage issues in the face of growing enrollments, and financial pressures stemming from curriculum changes and other state mandates.

**Table 4.3.1**  
**Research Priorities for Challenges Related to Facilities and Resources:**  
**Principals**

Category	Freq	Typical Comments
Funds for improvements to physical facility	18 (34.6%)	Lack of funds for needed maintenance and needed improvements
Other	9 (17.3%)	Principal autonomy in use of funds
Strategies for raising funds	7 (13.5%)	Help raising funds
Link between physical facilities and educational processes	7 (13.5%)	State of physical facility and school culture School and class size issues
Funds for staff, personnel, technology	6 (11.5%)	Additional support staff, outdated resources, growing population, and increasing mandates
Funding equity issues	3 (5.7%)	How to address inequities in funding
Funds for non-instructional materials	2 (3%)	Space needed for large events
Total	52	

## Other Challenges Faced by Superintendents and Principals

Superintendents identified financial challenges related to salaries, physical facilities, and support personnel (Table 5.1.1). They also noted parent and student engagement, as well as pressures from the state accountability system.

**Table 5.1.1**

<b>Other Major Challenges Faced in Your District: Superintendents</b>
Keeping up with growth and competitive salaries.
Changing the cultural mindset to one that believes all kids can learn at high levels.
Teacher recruitment and retention in a rural district.
... is currently in a financial crisis. We have a tax renewal on the ballot... It is critical that it passes (school closures). The decline in our school scores is a direct result of our inability to pay our teachers as much as our surrounding districts. We struggle every year to find certified, highly effective teachers, which has impact on student achievement.
Teacher pay, Location, Accountability system, Small staff.
Lack of parental support, Deterioration of facilities, Lack of high-quality principals.
Our district has had financial struggles for four years. To make matters worse, families have left to seek employment, which reduced our student enrollment substantially. Tough decisions have had to be made to attempt to balance the budget, including closing ... schools. Teachers have only had one small salary increase in ten years, given by the state in 2019. This makes it difficult to recruit and retain quality teachers.
Main issue is certified teachers (attract, support, and retain).
Teacher shortage is one of our main issues. The new curriculum and the accountability system are challenging. Student discipline and lack of parental support are also challenging.
Certified teachers.
Personnel....Personnel.....Personnel.....Personnel, etc.
Lack of parental support. Apathy of parents and students.
The constantly changing and more challenging LDOE accountability system is a challenge. Just as we become comfortable with the DPS and SPS configuration and assessment level related score, the rigor is amped up.



## Other Challenges Faced by Superintendents and Principals

Principal respondents to this item indicated a range of administrative tasks, including school culture, staff management, and relationships with central office (Table 5.1.2). Parental engagement was again noted as a challenge.

**Table 5.1.2**  
**Descriptions of Other Challenges Faced by School Principals**

Category	Freq	Typical Comments
School administration challenges	26 (29.9%)	School culture, staff management, and central office relationships are challenges.
Parental and student engagement	22 (25.3%)	Lack of parent engagement and support is a major challenge.
Addressing student needs	15 (17.24%)	Identifying and addressing the needs of a changing student body are challenges.
Administrator & teacher autonomy	8 (9.2%)	Lack of autonomy in schools is a challenge
Student to teacher ratio	5 (5.7%)	Growth in student population is a source of stress and strain on the system.
Teacher recruitment	3 (3.4%)	Teacher recruitment was again noted as a challenge
Challenges of rural schools	3 (3.4%)	Rural principals noted challenges related to finances and remoteness of their location
Other	3 (3.4%)	Other items included ACT policies, discipline, etc.
Teacher and staff attendance	2 (2.3%)	Teacher and staff attendance are disruptive factors in some schools.
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	

## Other Challenges Faced by Superintendents and Principals

Few superintendents responded to the request for research priorities in this area. Among principals, research priorities focused on school management and student issues (Table 5.2.1). The former included teacher and staff morale and effectiveness, increasing parental engagement, and effective use of school data. Student priorities focused on strategies for addressing the needs of students and promoting student engagement.

**Table 5.2.1**  
**Research Priorities Related to Other Challenges:**  
**Principals**

Challenges	Freq	Typical Comments
School management	16 (48.5%)	Priorities included teacher and staff morale and effectiveness, parent engagement, and using data
Student issues	13 (39.4%)	Priorities included students with special needs and student engagement
Academic strategies	4 (12.1%)	Priorities included development of assessments and personalizing instruction
Total	33	

## Challenges and Priorities Facing Public Schools in Louisiana: Views of Superintendents and Principals

### *Conclusion*

This report presents results of a survey of school superintendents and principals in Louisiana. The survey was designed to identify challenges and research priorities of school leaders in the state. Policy areas identified in this research include improving curricular autonomy, high stakes accountability demands, and responsiveness to changing student populations. More than half of Louisiana superintendents and more than one-quarter of principals responded to this survey. Noteworthy is that 54% of respondents served rural communities.

The results indicate that the most significant challenges faced by the responding school leaders are related to personnel, specifically principals and teachers. Respondents note a significant shortage of effective personnel, especially teachers. They attribute this shortage to a general decline in the number of students entering the teaching profession and to a variety of issues associated with teaching. In particular, they cite that **low pay, lack of autonomy, increasing high stakes accountability, mandated curriculum changes, and student-related challenges** encourage experienced educators to leave the profession and discourage prospective teachers from entering the profession. The result is that, in many schools, teachers have large classes, little autonomy, and a growing student population that increasingly brings mental health and other challenges which educators may not be prepared to address. In response, administrators often must hire unqualified persons or less-experienced teachers, many of whom are graduates of alternative certification programs which rarely prepare them with the pedagogical skills to be effective without significant support.

In addition to a shortage of effective teachers, administrators told of **financial challenges** with implications for support personnel, space, and, frequently, deteriorating physical facilities. These results raise questions about both the intrusiveness of state policies and their effectiveness, and about the ability of teacher preparation programs to produce a sufficient number of educators who are “ready” for the student population in the state. The results offer policymakers opportunities to improve the **learning environments and experiences** of students and educators during the school day. Identifying policies which contribute to professionalizing education will address the difficulties in recruiting and retaining diverse and well-prepared educators.

Policy areas identified in this research include improving curricular autonomy, high stakes accountability demands, and responsiveness to changing student populations.

## Challenges and Priorities Facing Public Schools in Louisiana: Views of Superintendents and Principals

### References

1. Ziegler. "Education rankings measuring how well states are educating their students," *US News*. (2020). <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/education>
2. Louisiana Department of Education. "Superintendent of Education releases statement regarding Louisiana students' achievements on National Assessment of Educational Progress," (October, 2019). [https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/links-for-newsletters/louisiana-2019-naep-results-summary.pdf?sfvrsn=bd999a1f\\_2](https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/links-for-newsletters/louisiana-2019-naep-results-summary.pdf?sfvrsn=bd999a1f_2)
3. Kaufman et al. *Raising the Bar: Louisiana's Strategies for Improving Student Outcomes, Research Report. RR-2303-BRAF*. (2018).
4. Baird et al. "What Other States Can Learn from Louisiana's Ambitious Efforts to Reshape Its Education System." (2019).
5. Wolf et al. "How has the Louisiana Scholarship Program Affected Students? A Comprehensive Summary of Effects after Four Years." (2019). <http://www.uaedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/LSP4-Policy-Brief-SCDP.pdf>
6. Latterman and Steffes. "Tackling teacher and principal shortages in rural areas." National Conference of State Legislatures. (2017).
7. Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas. "A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the US." (2016): 499-534.
8. Louisiana Department of Education. "2017-2018 Educator Workforce Report." (nd).
9. SAS Institute. *Getting started with SAS test miner 13.2*. SAS Institute (2012).

### Acknowledgments

Special thanks to the superintendents and principals who made time to respond to the survey.

Design and layout . . . . . Mary Woods

Encouragement of the project . . . . . Neil Mathews and Roland Mitchell