



New Orleans by the Numbers: ACT Scores, Class of 2012

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The Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University launched the NOLA by the Numbers series in October 2010. This series aims to provide journalists, policymakers, community leaders, and the public with a timely and comprehensive review of state-released school-level data on public schools in New Orleans. This briefing focuses on ACT scores for the graduating class of 2012. It, and others released by the Cowen Institute in the past, can be found at <http://www.coweninstitute.org>.

The Louisiana Department of Education releases annually the average composite, English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning American College Test (ACT) scores at both the district and school levels. ACT scores range from 1-36. The averages are computed using the ACT scores most recently obtained by the Louisiana public school students who were or would have been members of the graduating class of 2012.

The ACT, which students generally take in the 11th or 12th grade, is intended to measure students' general educational development and their capacity to complete college-level work. College entrance exams such as the ACT are required for admissions to most two- and four-year colleges and universities in the state. Beginning in the 2012-13 school year, all 11th grade students at public schools in Louisiana will be required to take the ACT, and their scores will account for one-quarter of the new high school accountability calculation.

Fast Facts

- ACT scores in New Orleans are improving at a faster rate than the state and national scores. The 2012 average ACT composite score for all public schools in New Orleans was 18.2, a 0.2 point increase from 2011. Comparatively, the state average ACT composite score, which includes public and private schools, increased 0.1 points to 20.3, and the national average remained the same at 21.1.
- New Orleans public schools' average ACT composite scores ranged from a low of 13.5 – the lowest in the state – to a high of 27.1 – the second highest in the state. Benjamin Franklin High School reported the highest score in New Orleans, while O.P. Walker Senior High School showed the most improvement from 2011 to 2012, increasing 1.6 points to a 19.4 average.
- Seven Recovery School District (RSD-NO) charter schools graduated their first class in 2012 and reported ACT scores for the first time. Together, these schools accounted for a third of all RSD-NO test-takers and scored an average composite score of 16.8, contributing to a 0.6 point increase for RSD-NO schools from 2011 to 2012.
- 38 percent of public school graduates in 2012 earned ACT scores high enough to qualify for a TOPS award, in addition to meeting the grade point average and coursework completion requirements.



ACT Scores in New Orleans and Louisiana

The average ACT composite score for all Louisiana public and nonpublic school students in the graduating class of 2012 was 20.3, an increase of 0.1 from last year. The national average, which also includes both public and nonpublic school students, stayed the same at 21.1. Based on 2012 average ACT composite scores, Louisiana ranked 41st in the nation and 11th of the 16 Southern Regional Education Board states.

Of the 70 school districts in Louisiana reporting average ACT composite scores in 2012, Orleans Parish tied with St. Landry Parish for 30th with a 19.5 average, and the Recovery School District (RSD) in New Orleans placed 65th with a 16.8 average. If all schools in New Orleans were considered a single school district, it would tie with St. John the Baptist Parish for 56th in the state.

The class of 2012 average ACT composite score for all public school students in New Orleans increased from 18.0 in 2011 to 18.2 in 2012, continuing a general upward trajectory since 2005 when the Orleans Parish district average was 17.0. New Orleans has also seen a gradual increase in the number of students taking the ACT over the last six years. 1,900 students in the class of 2012 took the ACT, or about 75 percent of the class.

ACT Scores in New Orleans by School Type

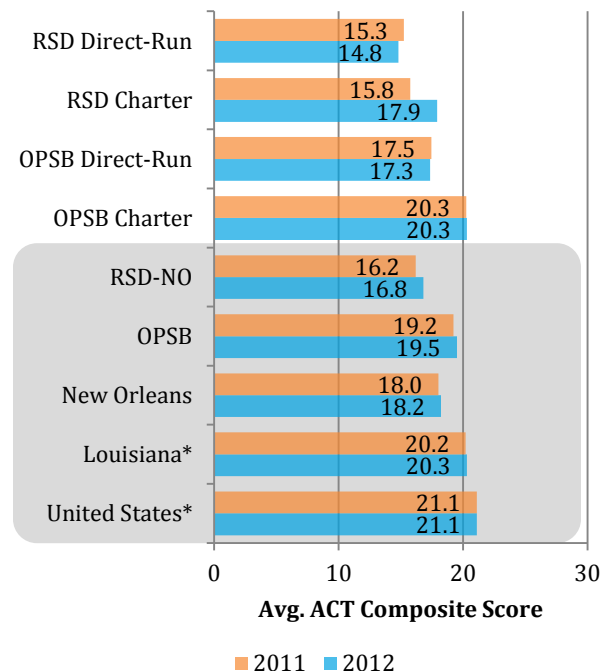
ACT performance at public schools in New Orleans varied significantly by school type. Of all school types in New Orleans, the five Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) charter schools, two of which have academic admissions requirements, reported the highest overall composite scores (20.3 average) and subject scores. OPSB charter schools saw no change in their average composite score from 2011, though individual school growth ranged from a 0.4 point decrease to a 0.5 point increase.

Figure 1: 2012 ACT Average Composite Score Range by School Type

	Lowest School Score	Average Composite Score	Highest School Score
RSD Direct-Run	14.2	14.8	15.1
RSD Charter	13.5	17.9	19.4
OPSB Direct-Run	15.8	17.3	18.6
OPSB Charter	17.1	20.3	27.1
RSD-NO	13.5	16.8	19.4
OPSB	15.8	19.5	27.1
New Orleans	13.5	18.2	27.1
Louisiana*	13.5	20.3	28.0

*State data include scores for public and nonpublic students; all other data are for public students only.
 Source: Louisiana Department of Education, "Louisiana ACT Scores, The Graduating Class of 2012, For Districts and Schools", Sept. 2012.

Figure 2: 2011 and 2012 Average ACT Composite Scores by School Type



*State and national averages include scores for public and nonpublic students; all other data are for public students only.
 Source: Louisiana Department of Education, "Louisiana ACT Scores, The Graduating Class of 2012, For Districts and Schools", Sept. 2012.

OPSB direct-run schools, on the other hand, reported an average composite ACT score of 17.3, which is a 0.2 decrease from 2011. Of the three schools, two decreased 0.2 points and one increased 0.1 points. Together, OPSB charter and direct-run schools improved 0.3 points from a 19.2 in 2011 to a 19.5 in 2012, though the two largest schools both saw 0.1 point decreases.

Though the RSD in New Orleans (RSD-NO) scored well below the OPSB average, RSD schools showed considerable growth, increasing 0.6 points from a 16.2 average composite ACT score in 2011 to a 16.8 in 2012. These schools were taken over by the state due to poor performance and tend to serve a lower income student population than OPSB schools, so their lower absolute performance is expected.

Much of the RSD's improvement from 2011 to 2012 was driven by seven charter schools that graduated their first class in 2012 and reported ACT scores for the first time. Together, these seven schools accounted for about half of all RSD charter school test-takers and scored an average composite score of 16.8. In addition, two other RSD charter schools were the two highest growth schools in the city. One RSD charter school, O. P. Walker Senior High School, had 245 test-takers—more than a quarter of all RSD-NO test-takers—gained an impressive 1.6 points from 2011 to earn an average composite score of 19.4 in 2012. (The appendix reports complete school-level data.)

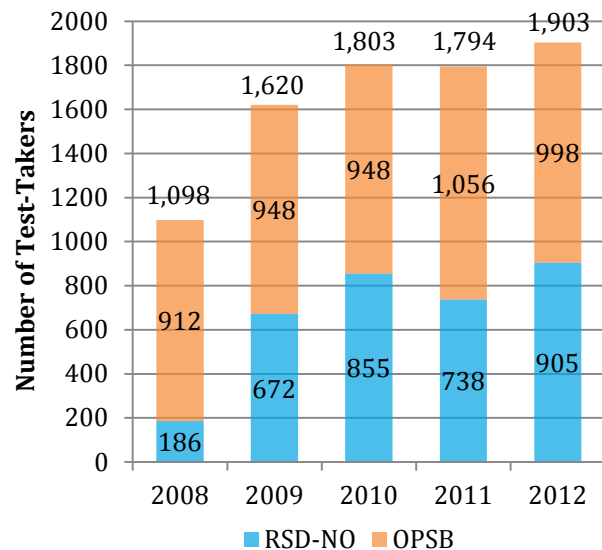
It is difficult to make comparisons between RSD charter schools and RSD direct-run schools due to school closures and transformations over the course of the class of 2012's high school careers. For the purposes of this analysis, school types are identified by the 2010-11 school year when the majority of the class of 2012 would have taken the ACT. Nonetheless, the six RSD direct-run schools reported the lowest ACT scores in 2012 with a 14.8 average composite score, 0.5 points lower than in 2011. All five RSD direct-run schools that reported ACT

scores in 2011 saw lower scores in 2012, decreasing between 0.2 and 0.9 points. All of these schools are now closed, slated to be closed, or are slated to be taken over by a charter operator.

Number of Test-Takers

The number of students taking the ACT each year has increased at nearly triple the rate of high school enrollment in New Orleans. High school enrollment at New Orleans schools increased 15 percent from 2007-08 to 2011-12, compared to a 75 percent increase in the number of ACT test-takers over the same period. Often ACT scores go down somewhat as participation expands, so the upward trend of both New Orleans' tested population and scores is positive. The increase in the number of test-takers is a result of both increases in the number of students tested at individual schools and the growing RSD charter schools. With seven charter schools reporting scores for the first time in 2012, RSD-NO led the state in growing the number of students who take the ACT from 2011 to 2012.

Figure 3: Number of ACT Test-Takers, 2008-2012



Source: Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana ACT Reports, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012.

Beginning in the 2012-13 school year, all 11th grade students in Louisiana will take the ACT. Previously, however, only a proportion of students at each school have taken the ACT. A low proportion of students taking the ACT may indicate that a school is not focused on college preparedness. Though it is also possible that students took the SAT college entrance exam instead of the ACT, most New Orleans students who took the SAT in 2012 attended OPSB schools, which had high numbers of both SAT and ACT testers.ⁱ The ACT is the more popular of the two exams at all public schools in New Orleans.

The LDOE does not report the percentage of students who took the ACT at each school, but it is possible to approximate a testing rate by comparing the number of reported test-takers in the class of 2012 with total 11th grade enrollment in the 2010-11 school year, when most students would have been tested. Based on this approximation, about 75 percent of students in the class of 2012 took the ACT. Over 90 percent of OPSB charter school students were tested, compared to about three-quarters of OPSB direct-run and RSD charter school students and just over half of RSD direct-run school students. Another way to think about the ACT testing rate is by comparing the number of test-

takers to the total number of graduates, though some students who took the ACT may not have graduated. In both 2011 and 2012, just over 2,000 students graduated from public schools in New Orleans.ⁱⁱ

Subject Area Scores and College Readiness Benchmarks

The ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks are the minimum ACT test scores required for students to have a high probability of success in credit-bearing college courses such as English composition, algebra, biology, and social sciences. The ACT empirically derived these benchmarks based on the actual performance of students in college. The following table compares the ACT's benchmarks for each subject with New Orleans' average subject scores by school type as well as the Louisiana and national averages. Bolded scores met or exceeded the benchmark.

Six schools in New Orleans earned an average English score that met or exceeded the benchmark, but only two schools met any of the other subject's benchmarks. Benjamin Franklin High School, a selective admissions magnet school, was the only school in New Orleans to meet all subject benchmarks.

Figure 4: 2012 ACT Average Subject Scores and College Readiness Benchmarks by School Type

	English	Math	Reading	Science
Benchmark	18	22	21	24
RSD Charter	16.9	17.7	17.4	17.9
RSD Direct-Run	12.8	15.8	15.2	15.6
OPSB Charter	20.8	20.0	20.3	19.8
OPSB Direct-Run	17.1	17.4	16.9	17.4
RSD-NO	15.7	17.2	16.6	17.2
OPSB	19.8	19.2	19.3	19.2
New Orleans	17.7	18.2	18.1	18.2
Louisiana*	20.4	19.9	20.4	20.1
United States*	20.5	21.1	21.3	20.9

*State and national averages include scores for public and nonpublic students; all other data are for public students only.
 Source: Louisiana Department of Education, "Louisiana ACT Scores, The Graduating Class of 2012, For Districts and Schools," Sept. 2012.

TOPS Scholarship Eligibility

In Louisiana, ACT scores are used to determine student eligibility for the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) awards, which provide free tuition to in-state two- and four-year public colleges and universities. Two-year technical or occupational scholarships require at least a 2.5 grade point average, completion of the tech core curriculum, and an ACT composite score of at least 17.ⁱⁱⁱ Four-year scholarships are available at three different levels, but the minimum requirement is at least a 2.5 GPA, completion of the core curriculum, and an ACT composite score of at least 20, based on the prior year's state average.^{iv}

Though New Orleans' schools made notable progress on the ACT from 2011 to 2012, the percentage of students eligible for a TOPS two- or four-year award remained about the same. In 2012, 39 percent of New Orleans' public school graduates qualified for a TOPS award, up just slightly from 38 percent in 2011 and below the 2012 state

public school eligibility rate of 43 percent. New Orleans' individual school TOPS eligibility rates for 2012 graduates ranged from a low of 8.5 percent to a high of 82.8 percent. A total of 806 public school graduates in New Orleans in 2012 qualified for a TOPS award, compared to 1,903 students who took the ACT, meaning about half of the ACT test-takers either did not score high enough to qualify for TOPS, did not graduate with the necessary coursework, and/or did not earn a 2.5 grade point average.

As illustrated in Figure 5, below, in both 2011 and 2012, OPSB graduates qualified for TOPS awards at nearly twice the rate of RSD-NO graduates, and charter school graduates outperformed direct-run school graduates in both the RSD-NO and OPSB. About two-thirds of all New Orleans graduates and three-quarters of all Louisiana graduates earned a TOPS four-year award, meaning they met or exceeded the state average on the ACT, in addition to meeting the other award requirements.

Figure 5: Public School Graduate TOPS Award Eligibility Rates, 2011 and 2012

	2011			2012		
	2-Year	4-Year	Total	2-Year	4-Year	Total
RSD Direct-Run	6.9%	6.6%	13.5%	2.2%	9.1%	11.3%
RSD Charter	13.2%	16.6%	29.8%	11.9%	22.4%	34.3%
OPSB Direct-Run	17.2%	20.8%	38.0%	12.2%	14.9%	27.1%
OPSB Charter	26.4%	23.1%	49.5%	17.1%	40.6%	57.7%
RSD-NO	10.0%	11.6%	21.7%	11.3%	16.8%	28.1%
OPSB	16.3%	34.0%	50.3%	15.6%	32.7%	48.3%
New Orleans	13.7%	24.5%	38.2%	13.6%	25.5%	39.1%
Louisiana	10.8%	32.8%	43.6%	9.7%	33.2%	42.9%

Source: Louisiana Department of Education, "High School Graduates (including Alternate Eligible) Eligible for a TOPS Award by School, School District and Parish," 2011 and 2012.

Conclusion

New Orleans' high schools have made major progress in ACT performance in recent years even as the number of test-takers increases. These positive trends suggest more students are graduating from high school prepared to succeed in college and careers. However, most schools reported scores that lag considerably behind the state and national averages, indicating that students may be underprepared for post-graduate success.

ACT performance will be increasingly important under Louisiana's new public school accountability system. Beginning with the graduating class of 2013, all 11th grade students will be required to take the ACT, and their scores will make up 25 percent of a high school's performance score. Students will earn up to 150.4 points based on their ACT composite score; students who score below 18—the majority of RSD-NO test-takers in 2012—will not earn any points towards their school's performance score under the ACT index. These changes could have a major impact on many New Orleans schools.



The Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University is an action oriented think tank that informs and advances research-based policy, legislative, and programmatic solutions to eliminate the challenges impeding the success of K-12 education in New Orleans and beyond.

Applied Research at the Cowen Institute

We serve as an objective voice to education leaders, policymakers, the media, and the public about what is taking place in public education in New Orleans—particularly in the areas of accountability, finance, facilities, and governance—by disseminating relevant data and research. This publication, and others released in the past, can be found at <http://education.tulane.edu>.

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Appendix

Table 1: New Orleans Public School ACT Scores, Graduating Class of 2012

	Student Count	Average ACT Score				
		Composite	English	Math	Reading	Science
Recovery School District - New Orleans (RSD-NO)						
Abramson Science & Technology Charter School	10	17.0	16.4	17.1	16.0	18.4
Algiers Technology Academy	39	17.1	16.0	17.1	16.8	17.9
Dr. M.L.K. Charter School for Science & Tech.	21	15.5	14.7	15.4	15.0	16.7
G.W. Carver High School	50	14.7	12.7	15.6	17.9	15.2
Greater Gentilly High School	30	15.0	13.5	16.0	14.9	15.1
John McDonogh Senior High School	62	14.2	12.0	15.5	14.0	15.0
Joseph S. Clark High School	64	15.0	13.5	16.0	15.0	15.2
Lake Area High School	104	16.9	16.6	16.9	16.4	17.1
Miller-McCoy Academy	44	15.4	14.1	16.1	15.4	15.8
O.P. Walker Senior High School	245	19.4	18.1	19.4	19.6	19.9
ReNEW Accelerated High School - City Park	15	13.5	12.5	15.0	14.3	12.7
Sarah T. Reed Senior High School	73	15.1	12.5	15.8	15.1	16.9
Sci Academy	53	19.2	20.5	19.0	18.0	18.6
Sojourner Truth Academy	23	16.8	16.6	16.4	16.3	17.3
Sophie B. Wright Inst. of Academic Excellence	28	16.8	16.6	16.7	16.3	16.8
Walter L. Cohen High School	38	14.8	13.2	16.0	14.3	15.4
<i>RSD-NO Total</i>	<i>899</i>	<i>16.8</i>	<i>15.5</i>	<i>17.0</i>	<i>16.7</i>	<i>17.1</i>
Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB)						
Architecture, Design & Engineering High School	26	15.8	14.3	16.2	15.7	16.5
Benjamin Franklin High School	137	27.1	28.4	26.1	28.1	25.5
Edna Karr High School	212	18.0	18.2	18.0	17.6	17.8
Eleanor McMain Secondary School	97	18.6	18.6	18.5	18.2	18.7
Lusher Charter School	93	24.1	25.6	22.8	24.2	23.2
McDonogh #35 Senior High School	150	16.8	16.7	16.9	16.2	16.8
New Orleans Charter Science and Math High	87	17.1	16.4	17.6	16.8	17.1
Warren Easton Senior High School	195	17.7	18.0	17.5	17.3	17.5
<i>OPSB Total</i>	<i>997</i>	<i>19.5</i>	<i>19.8</i>	<i>19.3</i>	<i>19.3</i>	<i>19.1</i>
New Orleans	1,896	18.2	17.7	18.2	18.1	18.2
Louisiana*	28,115	20.3	20.4	19.9	20.4	20.1
United States*	1,666,017	21.1	20.5	21.1	21.3	20.9

*State and national averages include scores for public and nonpublic students; all other data are for public students only.

Figure 2: New Orleans Public School Average ACT Composite Scores, 2009-2012

	Average ACT Composite Score			
	2009	2010	2011	2012
Abramson Science & Technology Charter School			17.0	17.0
Algiers Technology Academy	15.9	16.7	16.0	17.1
Architecture, Design & Engineering High School				15.8
Benjamin Franklin High School	27.1	28.1	27.4	27.1
Dr. M.L.K. Charter School for Science & Tech.				15.5
Edna Karr High School	18.4	17.9	18.1	18.0
Eleanor McMain Secondary School	18.7	18.4	18.5	18.6
G.W. Carver High School	14.4	14.2	15.0	14.7
Greater Gentilly High School				15.0
John McDonogh Senior High School	13.9	14.1	14.8	14.2
Joseph S. Clark High School	14.5	14.7	15.9	15.0
Lake Area High School				16.9
Lusher Charter School	23.9	23.4	23.6	24.1
McDonogh #35 Senior High School	16.7	17.0	17.0	16.8
Miller-McCoy Academy				15.4
New Orleans Charter Science and Math High	17.3	17.1	17.5	17.1
O.P. Walker Senior High School	14.7	16.9	17.8	19.4
ReNEW Accelerated High School - City Park				13.5
Sarah T. Reed Senior High School	15.1	15.4	15.3	15.1
Sci Academy				19.2
Sojourner Truth Academy				16.8
Sophie B. Wright Inst. of Academic Excellence				16.8
Walter L. Cohen High School	14.7	15.1	15.1	14.8
Warren Easton Senior High School	16.6	16.8	17.6	17.7
Recovery School District – New Orleans	15.0	15.6	16.2	16.8
Orleans Parish School Board	19.1	19.0	19.2	19.5
New Orleans	17.5	17.5	18.0	18.2
Louisiana*	20.1	20.1	20.2	20.3
United States*	21.1	21.0	21.1	21.1

*State and national averages include scores for public and nonpublic students; all other data are for public students only.

Figure 3: New Orleans Public School TOPS Award Eligibility, 2012 Graduates

	Graduate Count	TOPS Eligible		Eligibility Type	
		#	%	Four-Year (Honors, Performance, Opportunity)	Two- Year (Tech)
Abramson Science & Technology Charter School	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Algiers Technology Academy	57	14	24.6%	14.0%	42.9%
Architecture, Design & Engineering High School	62	6	9.7%	3.2%	66.7%
Benjamin Franklin High School	157	130	82.8%	82.8%	-
Joseph S. Clark High School	61	14	23.0%	9.8%	57.1%
Dr. M.L.K. Charter School for Science & Tech.	27	8	29.6%	7.4%	75.0%
Edna Karr High School	219	108	49.3%	25.6%	48.1%
Eleanor McMain Secondary School	105	49	46.7%	29.5%	36.7%
G.W. Carver High School	55	5	9.1%	-	100.0%
L.B. Landry High School	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Lake Area High School	121	46	38.0%	19.0%	50.0%
Lusher Charter School	93	75	80.6%	76.3%	5.3%
McDonogh #35 Senior High School	176	38	21.6%	10.2%	52.6%
John McDonogh Senior High School	59	5	8.5%	1.7%	80.0%
Miller-McCoy Academy	65	18	27.7%	12.3%	55.6%
Sci Academy	48	32	66.7%	43.8%	34.4%
New Orleans Charter Science and Math High	102	37	36.3%	12.7%	64.9%
O.P. Walker Senior High School	264	88	33.3%	29.2%	12.5%
Sarah T. Reed Senior High School	99	15	15.2%	3.0%	80.0%
ReNEW Accelerated High School #1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
ReNEW Accelerated High School #2	12	-	-	-	-
Schwarz Alternative School	1	-	-	-	-
Sojourner Truth Academy	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Sophie B. Wright Inst. of Academic Excellence	24	13	54.2%	29.2%	46.2%
Walter L. Cohen High School	61	6	9.8%	3.3%	66.7%
Warren Easton Senior High School	207	99	47.8%	22.2%	53.5%
Recovery School District - New Orleans	941	264	28.1%	16.8%	40.2%
Orleans Parish School Board	1,121	542	48.3%	32.7%	32.3%
New Orleans	2,062	806	39.1%	25.5%	34.9%
Louisiana	35,781	15,350	42.9%	33.2%	22.6%

End Notes

ⁱ College Board, "Louisiana Public Schools, Summary by High School: SAT®, SAT Subject Tests™, AP®, PSAT/NMSQT®," 2012.

ⁱⁱ Louisiana Department of Education, "High School Graduates (including Alternate Eligible) Eligible for a TOPS Award by School, School District and Parish," 2011 and 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance, "Louisiana's Taylor Opportunity Program for Students 'TOPS' Tech Award," September 2012.

^{iv} Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance, "Taylor Opportunity Program for Students: Opportunity, Performance and Honors Awards," September 2012.