


RESEARCH SERIES 

August 30, 2006 • Part 3 of 5



Public Education in the Baton Rouge Metropolitan Area:
Factors that Impact Student Achievement
(Part 3 of a 5-part series)



Baton Rouge Area Chamber

On September 30, voters throughout the Baton Rouge area will elect school board members for their districts. To spark discussion and galvanize public participation in the elections, the Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC) initiated a five-part research series highlighting key issues in the 11 school districts in the region. As individuals and companies frequently look to the quality of public education as a major factor in market evaluation, BRAC recognizes the importance of this issue to economic development. Education is intrinsically tied to workforce development and capacity, including literacy and knowledge of basic skills, and is a fundamental driver of economic prosperity.

The first part of the research series provided an overview of student achievement and district performance in the Baton Rouge area. Part 2 compared public school districts in our region with those in other metropolitan areas across Louisiana and the southern United States, paying particular attention to district performance, the differences between large urban and suburban districts, and socioeconomic factors that impact student achievement. The initial findings show that the level of poverty in a district/region generally has a very significant influence on student achievement, with variation across individual areas.

Building on the discussion of student achievement across districts and regions, this installment of the research series explores key factors that impact student achievement in the Baton Rouge area. Education policy experts have identified numerous “in-school” and “non-school” factors that have important influences on learning. This report compares these factors in the Capital Region’s public school districts to those in peer regions across Louisiana and the southern United States (see Part 2 for more information on selected regions). In-school factors covered in this report include characteristics of faculty and administrators, district funding and resources, and classroom quality and activities. Non-school factors include student life outside of school, parental involvement in education, and family and household characteristics.

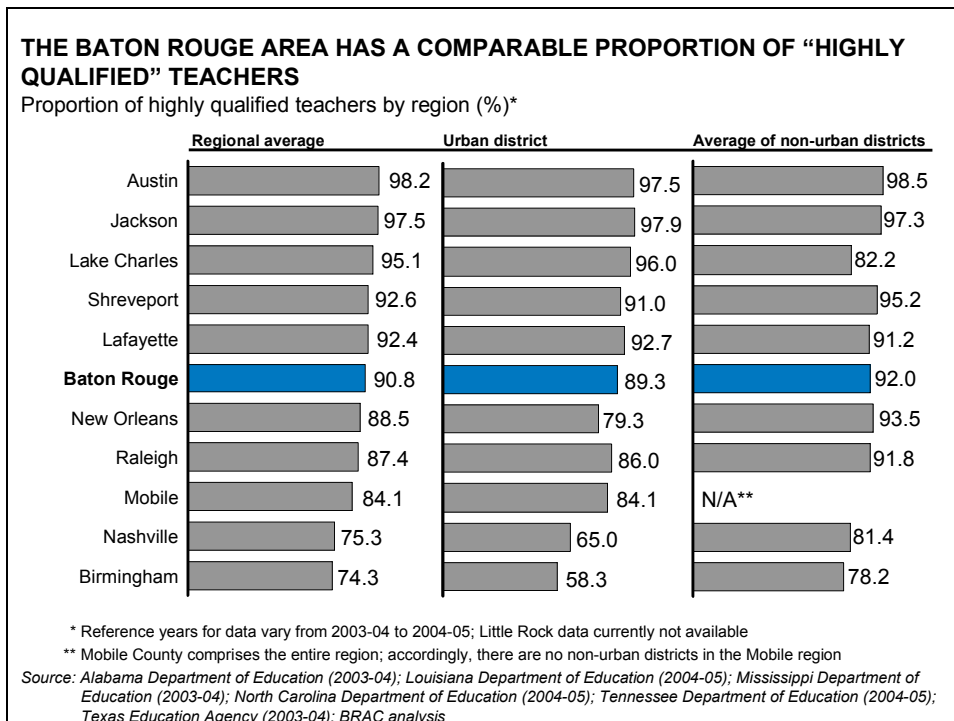
Given that young people typically spend only 13 percent of their waking hours in school from birth through age 18, it is necessary to consider the influence of non-school factors in order to fully understand the determinants of student achievement. While schools have only a limited ability to control these factors, a comprehensive approach to improve student achievement—including engagement across the community at large—could offer greater leverage over these influences. Nevertheless, there also are clearly many factors that schools control more directly.

In-School Factors

BRAC selected seven major in-school factors to include in its comparison of Baton Rouge area school districts to districts in peer regions: teacher quality, teacher salaries, expenditures per student, principal experience, student-teacher ratio, physical facilities, and school safety. We found that, in general, our 11 public school districts compare favorably on these factors to their counterparts in peer regions both in- and out-of-state.

First, **teacher quality**—measured here using the proportion of “highly qualified” teachers in public school districts—is one of the most widely acknowledged factors impacting student achievement. The definition and standards for “highly qualified” teachers are based on the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which explicitly recognizes the importance of teacher quality to overall student achievement. To attain “highly qualified” status, teachers must have a bachelor’s degree, full state certification, and “demonstrated competence in subject area knowledge and teaching.” In addition to these elements, motivation is a critically important aspect of teacher quality but more difficult to measure objectively. Experts increasingly state that the influence of teachers is the single-most important in-school factor in determining student achievement, with cumulative, lasting effects on students as they advance. Notably, the presence of effective teachers for consecutive years is proven to help close the achievement gap between minority and at-risk students and their peers.

In Louisiana, new standards for teacher quality were instituted in 1998 as a component of the broad revisions to the accountability system for K-12 education across the state. With the implementation of rigorous standards for certification, new policies for professional development, major recruitment and retention programs, and other efforts, Louisiana has made significant progress. In the 2004-05 academic year, 91.4 percent of classes in Louisiana were taught by “highly qualified” teachers. In 2006, the state received national attention and recognition of its newly instated high standards, ranking number one in the country for efforts to improve teacher quality by *Education Week*.

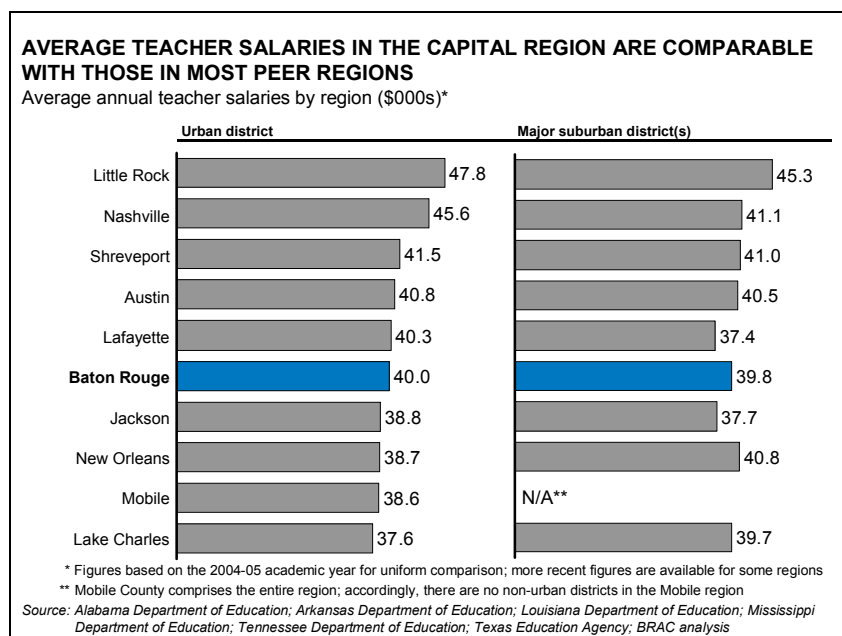


The Baton Rouge area has a proportion of “highly qualified” teachers that is comparable to that of our peer regions in general. In fact, more core courses are taught by “highly

qualified” teachers in Baton Rouge area schools than classes in Raleigh, Mobile, Nashville, or Birmingham. Our relatively high standing on this measure is largely driven by Louisiana’s award-winning education accountability program, with many regions in Louisiana posting large percentages of “highly qualified” teachers. In this context, even though the Baton Rouge area compares favorably to many out-of-state regions, it is second to last when compared to peer regions within the state. Similarly, East Baton Rouge (EBR) ranks relatively high compared to its counterparts in out-of-state regions but lags the major urban districts of most regions in Louisiana.

On the other hand, major suburban districts in the Baton Rouge area—including Ascension (96.6 percent) and Livingston (97.4 percent)—provide a greater percentage of “highly qualified” teachers than nearly any other urban or major suburban district in the selected regions. Not all non-urban districts in the Capital Region rank so high, however; only half of teachers in St. Helena are “highly qualified,” and just three out of four educators in East Feliciana and Pointe Coupee have met these standards. In every district, however, it is important to recognize that significant disparity may exist in teacher quality from school to school, as these figures represent district averages only.

Like teacher quality, **teacher compensation** is commonly associated with student achievement since compensation levels strongly impact the ability of districts to recruit and retain effective teachers. *In urban and major suburban districts in the Baton Rouge area, average teacher salaries are comparable to those in most peer regions*, including Austin, Lafayette, and Jackson. A few districts, however, are paying teachers at significantly higher levels on average than Baton Rouge area systems—over \$7,000 per year more in the case of Little Rock. Additionally, the Baton Rouge area is one of the few regions where the major urban district (EBR) does not pay a higher average salary than all the major suburban districts (e.g., Ascension).



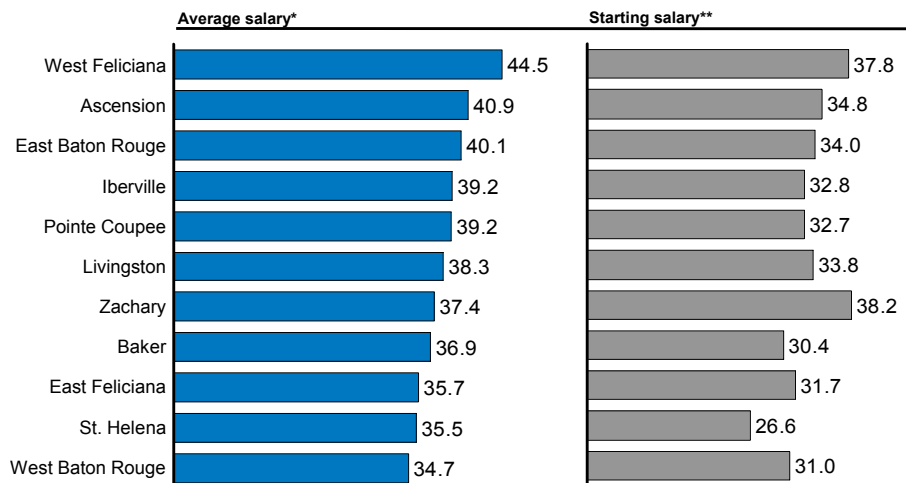
In addition to average salaries, “starting” salaries for entry-level teachers represent an important factor in recruiting and retaining effective teachers at the beginning of their careers. By this measure, teacher compensation in the Baton Rouge area appears relatively strong. The starting salary for a first-year teacher with a bachelor’s degree in EBR this year is \$34,025, better than that of all but two of its urban counterparts in the selected regions. Furthermore, starting salaries in the major suburban districts in the Baton Rouge area are also relatively strong.

Teacher Salaries in the Capital Region’s 11 Public School Districts

While teacher salaries in the Baton Rouge area are generally competitive with those in other selected regions, there is wide variation in salary levels among individual public school districts within the Capital Region. These disparities have a strong impact on our districts’ relative competitiveness in attracting qualified teachers. In particular, based on figures from the 2004-05 academic year, the urban district in the Capital Region—EBR—pays smaller salaries on average than some of its suburban counterparts (i.e., Ascension, West Feliciana). This difference is especially significant considering that the work of teachers in urban districts is typically considered “tougher” due to higher rates of poverty and lower public-school participation rates in the community at large. Some rural districts in the region face similar disadvantages in teacher recruitment due to relatively low salary levels, including East Feliciana and St. Helena. Given that teacher quality represents one of the most powerful factors impacting the achievement of disadvantaged students, competitive advantage in teacher recruitment has a substantial structural influence on student achievement.

LARGE DISPARITIES IN TEACHER SALARY EXIST ACROSS THE BR REGION

Average and starting annual teacher salaries by district (\$000s)



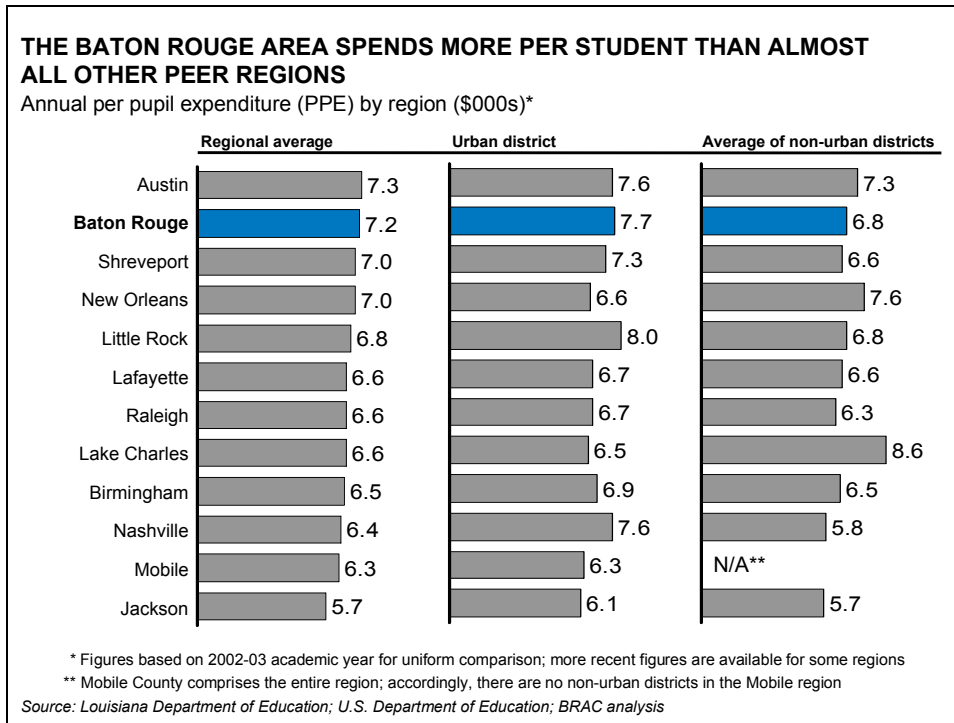
* Average salary figures based on the 2004-05 academic year. In the case of Zachary, recent substantial improvements in starting salaries are not represented in the 2004-05 average salary figure

** Starting salary figures are based on first-year teachers with a bachelor’s degree in the 2006-07 academic year as of August 1, 2006 (for districts where recent salary information was not available, the 2005-06 salary schedule was used and augmented with the state pay raise of \$1,500)

Source: Louisiana Department of Education; salary schedules and phone survey of individual districts; BRAC analysis

Like teacher salaries, the **level of expenditures** per student (excluding capital expenditures and debt service)—commonly called “per pupil expenditures” (PPE)—is another commonly cited in-school factor. Although the impact of funding levels remains

a subject of debate among experts, some research has demonstrated a correlation between PPE (i.e., money) and student achievement. In fact, some experts suggest that increasing funds for public education may have a particularly strong impact on performance when associated with targeted resource allocation that addresses specific needs. Such funds and reforms for minority and at-risk students, in particular, tend to elevate student achievement across the board. Accordingly, those districts with the greatest proportion of at-risk students—like many in the Baton Rouge area—may stand to benefit the most from increased funding levels coupled with effective resource allocation.



The average PPE across the Baton Rouge area is greater than that of any of the selected peer regions except Austin. This relatively high regional average largely is driven by the \$7,660 annual PPE in EBR, the second highest among the urban school districts surveyed. On average, non-urban districts in the Baton Rouge area fall in line with their counterparts in peer regions, although PPE ranges in these districts from \$5,654 (Livingston) to \$9,216 (West Feliciana). While spending in the Baton Rouge area compares favorably to peer regions, it is also important to note that schools serving a relatively large proportion of at-risk students—like many of those in the Capital region—may require additional spending to address the challenges associated with their student demographic (see Parts 1 and 2 for more information on the impact of poverty on student achievement).

Some experts believe that increased PPE for instruction is one means to target resources directly to students and classroom needs. Although analyses in our state have shown only a weak relationship between instructional expenditures and

performance, it is still useful to understand how districts in our area compare on this indicator. In this regard, districts in the Baton Rouge area generally fall below peer regions in the percentage of resources devoted to “instructional expenditures,” such as teacher salaries and textbooks. EBR, for example, spent 55 percent of its resources on instruction in 2002-03 compared with 58 percent in Austin ISD and 62 percent in Nashville. EBR’s low ranking in this area may result from spending a relatively large share of resources (27 percent) on non-administrative support operations (e.g., maintenance, transportation, food services) compared to other major urban districts such as Jackson (23 percent), Austin and Nashville (18 percent), and Wake County (16 percent). In some cases, however, suburban districts in the Capital Region fare better. Ascension and Livingston both spent 64 percent on instruction—equal or higher to most of their counterparts in peer regions.

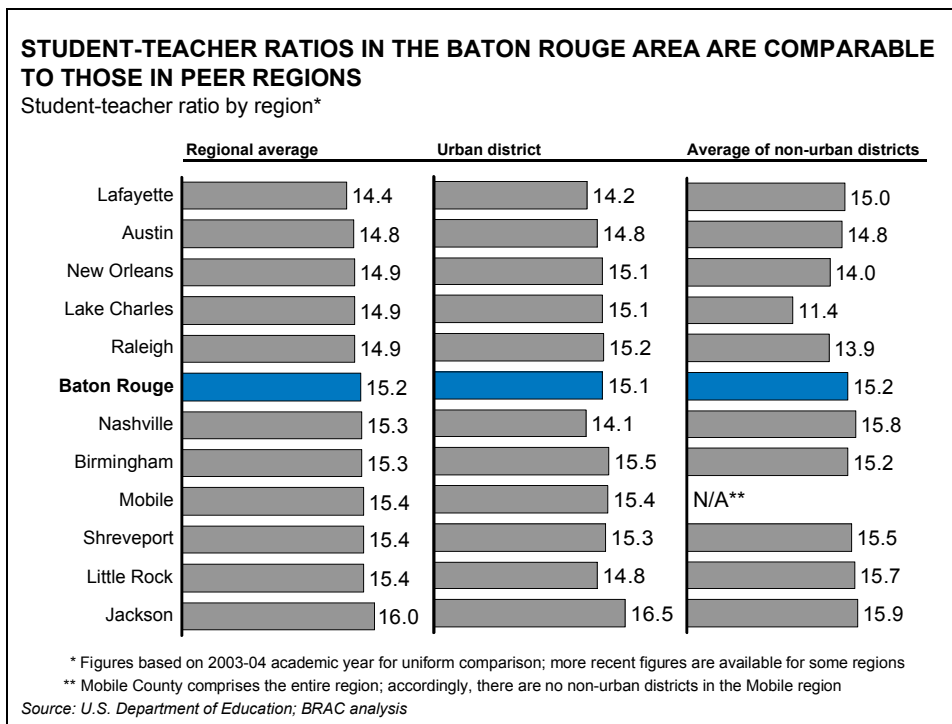
Research indicates that the **characteristics and experience of principals** also impact student achievement. Experts have identified key responsibilities of school administrators that can positively affect school performance, such as the hiring of and support for qualified teachers, creation of standard procedures at the school level, engagement with teachers to design and implement policies, and regular monitoring of school programs and practices to understand their effectiveness. In recognition of the importance of school leadership, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 reinforced the notion that principals—like teachers—require training in order to be effective in their leadership role and to advance performance at the school level. Louisiana also has instituted higher standards for principals, including a mandate that new school administrators must participate in an induction program that links “leadership proficiency and skill to productive schools and enhanced student achievement.”

Within the state of Louisiana, EBR has some of the most experienced school administrators. Over 86 percent of principals in EBR have at least 20 years experience. This figure decreases to 79 percent across the Baton Rouge area as a whole, as only 72 percent of principals in Livingston, for example, have comparable experience. This factor alone is not a predictor of leadership quality and motivation, for which there are few quantifiable measurements. Viewed in another way, however, a high number of very experienced principals may represent an important opportunity for school districts: as administrators begin to retire and new leaders emerge, there is room for fresh ideas and approaches, which should be cultivated and encouraged.

Another factor with a frequently cited impact on student achievement is **class size and student-teacher ratio**. While the student-teacher ratio represents a general description of the level of attention for each student for comparative purposes, it is not a measurement of the number of students in each classroom. For example, in public schools across the country in 2000, the student-teacher ratio was 15.6, but the average class size was 20.9 since not all teachers are staffed in traditional classroom environments. Despite the fact that the research linking class size and student achievement remains a subject of debate among experts, reducing class size has become a cornerstone of national and state policy. Nearly half of all states have

enacted legislation and policies to reduce class size to 20 students or less. As of 2005, over half of all classes in Louisiana had less than 20 students.

Smaller classes and increased interaction between teachers and students *in the early grades* can particularly benefit some targeted groups, with the greatest positive impacts seen in minority students during their first year of formal schooling. When class sizes in elementary schools are small (i.e., 13 to 17 students per class) for consecutive years, for example, student achievement can be enhanced throughout the student’s academic career—even when returning to full-size classes—especially among those students most in need of support. A lower student-teacher ratio also contributes to fewer behavior problems, allowing teachers to focus more on instruction and less on classroom management. This fact was shown to enhance student achievement in a study conducted in Louisiana, where teachers in small classes were more likely to use facial expression and eye contact, make more positive remarks than negative ones, conduct small group activities, and engage in productive, nurturing interactions that may partially explain higher achievement in small classes.



In general, *districts in the Baton Rouge area have a comparable student-teacher ratio to their peers in other selected regions.* Overall, the Baton Rouge area has a student-teacher ratio of 15.2. Among selected regions, the Lafayette area has the lowest student-teacher ratio (14.4), while the Jackson region has the highest (16.0). Although the Baton Rouge area falls short of the Louisiana average of 14.8 students per teacher, it fares better than five of the seven out-of-state peer regions, as well as the national average (15.9). Additionally, only four other urban districts have a smaller ratio than EBR. In our region’s non-urban districts, West Feliciana (12.2) and Iberville (13.2)

exhibit very low ratios compared to their counterparts in peer regions, but Livingston (16.1) and Zachary (18.7) do not compare as favorably.

Another aspect of school climate—and a frequently cited determinant of student achievement—is the state of **physical facilities**. Research shows that higher achievement is associated with newer buildings and overall facility conditions, as is improved health and attendance. In particular, studies show a 5 to 17 percentile point difference between achievement of students in poor buildings and those students in “standard” buildings, even when the socioeconomic status of students is controlled. Quality of facilities has also been linked with improved student behavior, fewer discipline problems, and more positive attitudes and relationships among teachers and students in general. In fact, research has linked the quality of facilities to the ability to retain teachers; in one study, this factor was even more important than teacher compensation to their decision to remain in a given school or district.

Of the seven in-school factors reviewed in our research, the quality of physical facilities was the only one where the Baton Rouge area apparently trails its peer regions by a substantial degree. Low investment in facilities appears to be a statewide trend. In fact, the Baton Rouge area fares relatively well when compared to the Louisiana average. For facility maintenance and repair, Louisiana schools spent approximately \$133 per student per year, while districts in the Baton Rouge area spent an average of nearly \$350. The average in our area is bolstered by high expenditures for facility repairs and maintenance in EBR (\$578 per student), compared to only \$160 in Livingston and \$93 in Ascension. Nevertheless, the average age of facilities in EBR is greater than 40 years, and many lack adequate electrical systems, roofing, HVAC systems, and learning equipment/materials. Even after the most critical facility needs are addressed by ongoing capital improvement programs, approximately \$600 million in additional identified needs in EBR must be addressed for facilities to meet official specifications.

The cost of maintenance, repair, and construction for schools throughout the country is rising annually due to higher enrollment, increased technology demands, and aging facilities. Construction and repair is primarily a local responsibility, which can lead to wide variations in funding and costs across school districts. Experts note that districts with low property wealth, numerous competing needs, and debt limitations face particular constraints in raising the necessary resources for improving school facilities.

Even more important than the quality of facilities may be the general climate within schools—namely, **school safety**. In the 1970s and 1980s, as violence and drug use increased on campuses nationwide, school districts adopted zero-tolerance policies, enlisted the assistance of law enforcement, and instituted various conflict resolution, drug awareness, bullying prevention, and mentoring programs to encourage a learning environment that is first safe, then productive. Arguably, this action—and continued focus and funding encouraged by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001—has made some impact on decreasing violence and crime on campus, as national crime rates against students at school declined by 53 percent for theft and 42 percent for violent

crimes between 1992 and 2003. Yet crime and violence have not disappeared, particularly in high-poverty urban districts, as school conditions tend to reflect their surrounding communities. The factors that contribute to violence in schools mirror those in the greater community: racism, drug abuse, access to weapons, child abuse and neglect, inadequate parenting, unemployment, and exposure to violence in the media, among others.

Although difficult to quantify, the perceptions of students regarding their safety can be an important indicator of this factor. *Students in the Baton Rouge area perceive the risk factors for school safety, such as drugs and guns, in similar ways to students across the state.* In Louisiana, approximately one in four sixth graders perceives drugs and handguns as available, which is related to both a higher risk of crime as well as alcohol or drug abuse among adolescents. Across the state, surveys suggest that less than one percent of high school seniors actually carried a handgun to school, six percent have been arrested, 12 percent have attacked someone with the intent to harm, and 15 percent have been drunk or high at school.

Interestingly, student surveys conducted in urban or suburban districts across the Baton Rouge area indicate similar levels of school safety. Contrary to popular belief, slightly more sixth graders in Ascension and Livingston perceive handguns as available than students in EBR, and more seniors in Ascension say they have been arrested and have been drunk or high at school than students in EBR or Livingston.

In sum, public school districts in the Baton Rouge area compare fairly well to their counterparts in other regions based on the in-school factors considered here. Nevertheless, student achievement in the Capital Region generally lags that of peer regions (see Part 2 for more information on our relative standing). This apparent contradiction can be attributed, in part, to the need to continually examine the evolving needs of students and adjust teaching and administrative efforts appropriately. Furthermore, there is no "silver bullet" among the in-school factors. It is important to note, however, that there are a number of other important in-school factors that influence student achievement, including curriculum design, teaching methods, technology and materials, school size, and other issues.

There is another set of factors that are largely beyond the direct control of teachers and schools. As discussed in the initial parts of this research series, public schools in the Baton Rouge area face greater challenges than their peers in most other selected regions. In particular, the high proportion of at-risk students in the Baton Rouge area, especially in school districts which face the greatest levels of poverty, poses substantial challenges to learning that many other regions simply do not experience as acutely.

The Impact of Non-School Factors on Student Achievement

There are numerous factors *outside* of the classroom and away from school grounds that also impact student achievement. Given that children typically spend only 13

percent of their waking life at school through age 18, it is not surprising that experts have concluded that non-school factors can be as important to student achievement as the in-school factors presented above. The choices, activities, and lifestyles of individual students, parental involvement and expectations, and family and household characteristics influence the academic achievement of young people as well as their future education and employment. While it is difficult to compare regions in terms of non-school factors for lack of sufficient data, it is clear that these factors have a substantial impact on student achievement in the Baton Rouge area.

In the earliest years of a child's life, differences in parenting and the home environment often create and/or exacerbate the gap between children of middle-income families and those of low-income families. The effect of nurture, discipline, teaching, language, and resources is cumulative and increases in impact through each year of school as students fall further behind. However, early, effective interventions can decrease the gap.

Parental involvement in education is perhaps the most recognized non-school factor impacting student achievement. Research indicates a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including improved academic achievement. In addition to higher test scores, parental involvement and expectations lead to a higher pass rate, increased attendance, and improved behavior at schools and in the home. *In the Baton Rouge area, students in more affluent suburban districts are more likely to feel connected to and supported by their families than their peers in EBR.* For example, only 47 percent of sixth graders in EBR report a high level of family attachment—“that they are a valued part of their family”—compared to 55 percent in Ascension and 59 percent in West Feliciana. As these differences suggest, family wealth and income levels have a positive influence on parental involvement in general.

The participation of parents in parent-teacher conferences, discussions with school officials, attendance at school events, and other means of engagement in their children's school activities has modest positive effects on student achievement. More active forms of involvement, such as volunteering or class visits, yield the greatest results. Many experts argue that the stronger variable is parental participation in education at home through high expectations and encouragement for academic success, involvement with homework, and daily reading and learning activities.

Experts have also found that **time-use habits** and the quality of individual students' **out-of-school activities**—combined with high parental and teacher expectations—have a powerful effect on student achievement, even more than parental education levels and socioeconomic background combined. In particular, “high-yield” out-of-school activities, including reading and participation in intellectually stimulating games and hobbies, can reinforce formal classroom learning and support student achievement. In general, students in high-poverty schools have less access to extracurricular school activities and are less likely to participate, as well. For example, 74 percent of Zachary

seniors—with the lowest percentage of at-risk young people of any district in the Capital Region—report “opportunities for pro-social involvement” at school. Students reported fewer opportunities in districts with higher levels of poverty: 61.3 percent in EBR (75 percent at-risk), 45.7 percent in Iberville (84 percent at-risk), and only 42.1 percent in Baker (70 percent at-risk). Contrary to the national trend among urban districts, only 35 percent of seniors in EBR reported a “low commitment to school,” while these numbers were actually above the state average in Ascension (48 percent) and Livingston (43 percent).

Another important non-school factor is **stability**, often measured in terms of student mobility (i.e., how often students change schools for non-promotional reasons). Experts have concluded that student mobility correlates with poor student achievement, disciplinary problems, a greater likelihood of victimization at school, and diminished prospects for graduation. High turnover rates cause a “chaos” factor according to educators, negatively impacting the school climate, classroom environment, teacher morale, and even the achievement of non-mobile students, while creating an administrative and financial burden for the school in general. Nationally, urban students are far more likely than their peers to change schools on a regular basis, even after accounting for socioeconomic background. For example, 46 percent of urban eighth-grade students changed schools two or more times since the first grade, as opposed to 34 percent of suburban and 28 percent of rural students. The degree of change is also expressed as a “mobility rate”: the cumulative number of students who enter or exit schools during an academic year as a percent of the number in school at the beginning of the year.

During the 2004-05 academic year, the mobility rate across the entire EBR school district was 42 percent, with the rate for many individual schools in the range of 50 to 75 percent. During the same academic year, Ascension, with a much lower proportion of children from low-income families, experienced a mobility rate of less than 25 percent.

Additionally, the **educational attainment of parents** can impact student achievement. Parents with relatively strong educational backgrounds also generally provide their children with greater guidance on homework and other school-related activities. Furthermore, when one or more parents has received a college degree, they are more likely to have more funds to invest in education and are more supportive of academic success, leading to higher educational achievement among their children compared to students whose parents did not attend college. Nationally, the parents of at-risk students are the least likely to have attended four years at a university (11 percent), while 41 percent of parents in low-poverty schools had completed college.

These socioeconomic dynamics also impact children in their early years. In general, children of low-income families are exposed to a relatively limited vocabulary and are more frequently prohibited from talking. As such, children of low-income families on average begin school with much smaller vocabularies and weaker non-cognitive skills (e.g., socialization) than their middle-income peers. Studies indicate that these factors

impact subsequent verbal ability, receptive and spoken language, and academic achievement in kindergarten through grade 3.

Parental participation in the workforce also affects student achievement. Parental employment in stable, two-parent, economically secure families tends to lead to higher achievement. In single-parent homes, the absence of the parent due to working hours may negatively affect their child's performance. The field of employment also corresponds with student achievement. For instance, the students of parents with "high occupational status" scored higher in mathematics than those with "middle" or "low" occupational status. Research has also shown that working class parents are more likely to view education as the "schools' job."

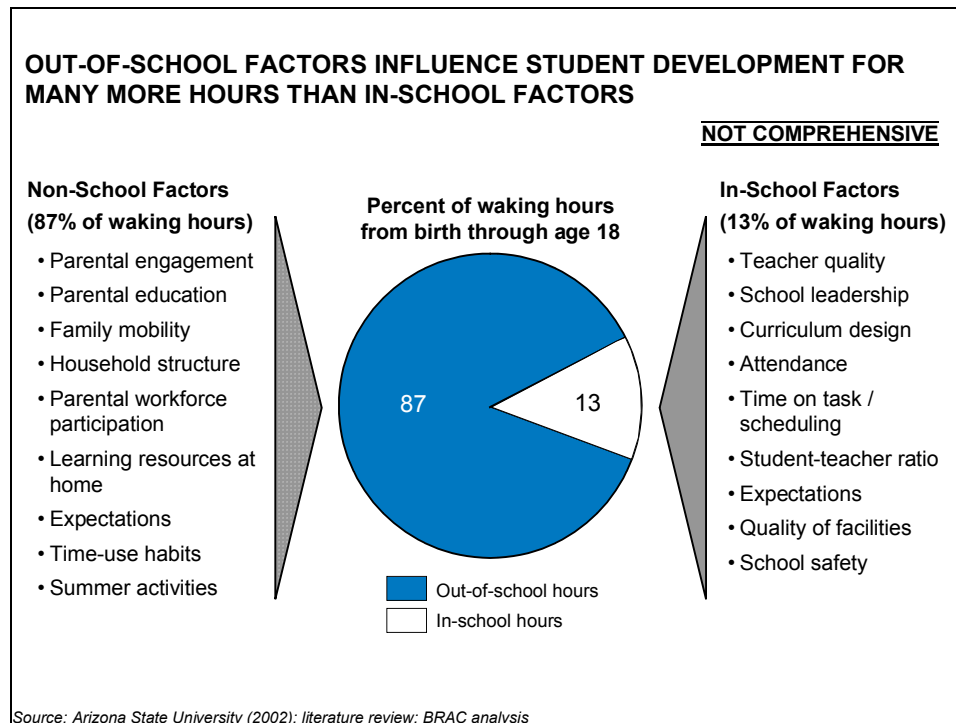
In addition, **family structure** impacts student achievement. In general, single parents have less free time to spend with their children than those in two-parent households, which correlates to lower student achievement. This disparity is most prominent in high-poverty areas, as greater numbers of at-risk and urban students live with only one parent. Across the nation, 68 percent of urban students live with both parents, while 81 percent and 80 percent of suburban and rural students, respectively, are from two-parent households. However, when single mothers and fathers are involved in their children's schools—just less than half of all single parents are described as "highly involved"—these students are more likely to score higher on tests and less likely to repeat a grade or be subjected to disciplinary action.

In sum, various non-school factors have a profound influence on student achievement. *Unfortunately, while comparative data on non-school factors generally is unavailable, our region's relatively high poverty levels (see Parts 1 and 2 of this series) suggest that we compare poorly to our peer regions on most non-school factors.* Among them, parental involvement in the home and the educational attainment of parents may play the most important role in determining a child's level of success and academic future. The socioeconomic background of students and parents can compound these factors and place at-risk children at a disadvantage on many levels. In addition to the challenges discussed in this section, the lives of many at-risk students are affected by general instability and conflict in the home and neighborhood, greater likelihood of drug and alcohol abuse among family members, higher levels of stress, and poor nutrition, health, and sleeping patterns. Yet when their parents are invested and involved in their education, these students can exhibit performance at levels comparable to students from other backgrounds.

Improving Student Achievement – The Need for a Comprehensive Approach

In recent years, school districts across the Baton Rouge area have made substantial strides to improve student achievement. These efforts have been successful in that, on average, school systems in the Capital Region meet or exceed their peers in addressing many in-school factors that impact student learning. Furthermore, with one exception, every public school district in the Baton Rouge area has posted improvements over the

past two years on broad measures of school performance. However, despite these successes, educational outcomes in the Baton Rouge area continue to trail most peer regions in absolute terms. This apparent paradox suggests a complex interplay of factors impacting student achievement.



Accordingly, it will take a broad-based approach for our public school systems in the Baton Rouge area to achieve nationally competitive results. Our public school systems should continue to make advances on various in-school factors and, where possible, address non-school factors that impact student achievement. Although the latter set of issues is traditionally considered outside the direct purview of our schools, it is clear that these determinants are equally if not more important to the success of students and the future of public education in the Baton Rouge area.

Research and “best practices” are available from across the country, and there are lessons that can be utilized by school districts in our area. Yet each community, as a body of citizens, must work together to prioritize the needs and reforms that best fit its unique group of students. In part, this will require an ongoing examination and discussion of the needs of our students and schools combined with a commitment to act by leaders and citizens alike. We should strive to expand our conception of education in the Capital Region to include the critically important out-of-school hours, including after-school hours and “summer vacation.” In other words, maximizing student achievement in the Baton Rouge area means that we must become a “learning community”—a place where formal and informal education are widely embraced, where workers seek and prepare for knowledge-based jobs, and where lifelong learning is a common pursuit of our culture.

Finally, continued improvement to address both in-school and non-school factors, even with a broader conception of schooling, is not enough. To address the social and economic issues that negatively impact student achievement, our community must continue to pursue job creation and economic growth, even as public school systems continue making advances, such that families in the Baton Rouge area have access to greater economic opportunity. As suggested by the complex relationship of factors impacting student achievement, our region must take a comprehensive approach to attain the quality of public schools and educational outcomes that we desire. Our future economic prosperity will depend on how successful we are in continuing and accelerating our efforts to improve student achievement throughout the Baton Rouge area.



Building on the findings in this part of our research series, BRAC has conducted a survey of citizens across the Baton Rouge area to determine public opinion on our public school systems, factors influencing student achievement, and the effectiveness of various reform initiatives. The results of the survey will be presented in the next part of this research series, which will compare these perceptions to reality in the Baton Rouge area. Finally, this series will conclude with an outline of programs and reform initiatives for improving student achievement in the Baton Rouge area.