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Public schools shrink while staffing grows

With state funding uncertain, tough choices are ahead



STAFF PHOTOS BY LESLIE WESTBROOK

St. Landry Parish school buses are parked outside the school system warehouse in Opelousas on Monday.

BY PATRICK WALL
Staff writer

Joey Richard likes to say that he conducts research from behind his barber chair. It's where Richard, the owner of Hollywood Cutz barber shop in Opelousas, deduced that the local school system is shrinking. "Every year I've been in business," he said, "I'm cutting less and less kids."



EMPTY DESKS

THE CRISIS OF DECLINING ENROLLMENT IN LA'S TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Second in an occasional series

Like nearly every other school district in Louisiana, St. Landry Parish has seen enrollment fall as families have fewer kids, move away or opt for charters or homeschool. Yet even as the school system lost roughly a quarter of its students over the past decade, its workforce grew by nearly 20%. School officials say the positions are necessary to serve the area's many students with complex needs — but it's not clear the district can afford them. Richard, who has two school-aged children and whose wife is a classroom aide, watched with dismay last month as local voters rejected a tax hike that would have boosted school employees' low pay, leading frustrated bus drivers — who earn less than \$25,000 annually — to stage a sick-out. When Richard attended the School Board meeting a few days after the May vote, an official in the finance department said he would cut some positions and reduce his own salary to chip away at the district's nearly \$8 million deficit.

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School enrollment down, employment up

Nearly 40% of Louisiana school districts lost students from 2014 to 2024 even as they added employees.

School district	↓ STUDENTS	↑ STAFF
Allen Parish	-11%	6%
Beauregard Parish	-7%	1%
Cameron Parish	-13%	2%
City of Monroe School District	-4%	8%
Claiborne Parish	-4%	34%
Concordia Parish	-18%	5%
Evangeline Parish	-13%	5%

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, Common Core of Data Staff graphic

► See more of this graphic inside. PAGE 4A



Joey Richard and his son Dylan, 12, chat as they walk and roll down to their neighborhood mailboxes in Sunset on Monday. Dylan will enter sixth grade this fall at Helix AI and Medical Academy.

Legislature passes more than 900 bills

Louisiana's 2027 budget includes economic incentives, raises for state workers

BY ALYSE PFEIL
Staff writer

When the U.S. Supreme Court issued its April 29 ruling in Louisiana v. Callais, it sent the state Legislature into overdrive.

The high court's ruling — which found the state's congressional voting map unconstitutional because the legislature relied too heavily on race in drawing it — caused Gov. Jeff Landry to cancel elections for the U.S. House just days before early voting, and sent the House and Senate scrambling to assemble a new map in the final month of the session.



Landry

Landry and the Legislature's GOP supermajority eliminated one of the state's two majority-Black, Democratic-leaning districts. That left one such district that ties together New Orleans and Baton Rouge and five solidly Republican districts.

The push to eliminate the majority-Black district drew intense opposition. Several hearings on the new map lasted for hours as speakers accused Republican leaders of disenfranchising Black voters, undermining decades of hard-won civil rights progress.

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La. heavily relying on nondisclosure agreements in economic talks

Officials say secrecy necessary to protect deals from competing states

BY SAM KARLIN
Staff writer

As Louisiana officials negotiated with Hyundai to build a massive steel mill in the state, they used confidential agreements to provide much more generous incentives than have been publicly known.

Records obtained by The Times-Picayune show that Louisiana — through the state and local governments and Entergy — collectively offered incentives worth \$2.6 billion to Hyundai, a package that amounts to roughly half the overall cost of the \$5.8 billion steel plant that the company plans to build in Donaldsonville.

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