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EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH

School enrollment down nearly 6%



STAFF PHOTO BY JAVIER GALLEGOS

Students head home from LaBelle Aire Elementary on Thursday. LaBelle Aire had the biggest one-year decline in enrollment in East Baton Rouge Parish.

Closure of two charter schools a factor in drop

BY CHARLES LUSSIER
Staff writer

For the second year in a row, the East Baton Rouge Parish school district is starting classes with far fewer students than the year before. East Baton Rouge Parish schools had 36,026 students enrolled at 74 schools as of Sept. 1. That compares to Sept. 1, 2025, when the district started with 38,244 students enrolled at 77 schools. That is a decline of 2,218 students, or 5.8%. These numbers are not final. Official enrollment counts for public schools in Louisiana occur twice a year — on Oct. 1 and Feb. 1. Each student gone equates to thousands of dollars in lost state education funding. Last year saw a 3.6% year-over-year decline. If declines continue at the current pace, East Baton

10 Baton Rouge public schools with biggest 1-year enrollment declines

SCHOOL	ENROLLMENT (Sept. 1, 2026)	1-YEAR CHANGE
LaBelle Aire Elementary	277	▼ -158
Woodlawn High	1,120	▼ -139
Park Forest Elementary	396	▼ -123
Liberty High	1,083	▼ -110
Great Hearts Harveston	562	▼ -108
McKinley High	597	▼ -103
Belaire High	519	▼ -97
Helix Mentorship and Maritime Academy*	479	▼ -97
Tara High	987	▼ -81
Southeast Middle	679	▼ -80

*Operated as two schools last year.
Source: East Baton Rouge Parish School System

Staff graphic

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SpaceX plan could restore coastal wetlands

But proposal unclear on extent of projects

BY ALEX LUBBEN
Staff writer

A plan to build what may be the world’s largest spaceport would be supremely ambitious for any location. But in the marshes of south Louisiana, where a football field of land disappears every 100 minutes, Elon Musk’s grand vision for SpaceX will be confronted with unique challenges. On top of the technical considerations of building what Musk calls Starbase Louisiana near Pecan Island, coastal restoration groups will be watching closely to see how the project fits into the state’s long struggle against land loss. SpaceX’s President and Chief Operating Officer Gwynne Shottwell pledged to carry out restoration projects in Vermilion Parish in cooperation with the state’s coastal authority. “The work includes thousands of acres of marsh creation to reconnect fragmented wetlands and help restore the natural storm buffer that this coast has lost,” she said. But the scale of the project and the complex circumstances surrounding it have raised a host of questions whose answers are not yet clear. They include how a settlement in a lawsuit over coastal damage, through which SpaceX has acquired access to the land, will ultimately benefit restoration efforts. A separate issue involves how a federal push to speed the regulatory approval process for aerospace developments may affect the project. Work to restore the state’s coastline has long been viewed as vital in south Louisiana. There are hopes that SpaceX’s plans will serve as a win-win, stoking economic development while providing needed



“The work includes thousands of acres of marsh creation to reconnect fragmented wetlands and help restore the natural storm buffer that this coast has lost.”

GWYNNE SHOTWELL, SpaceX president and chief operating officer

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Midterm elections heading into the home stretch

BY PATRICK WHITTLE and BILL BARROW
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine — Troy Jackson was a longtime labor activist and logger before he unexpectedly became the Democratic nominee for U.S. Senate in Maine. On Monday, he returned to a union hall to tell workers they need to go to the polls this fall — to raise the minimum wage, expand family medical leave and show support for one another. “Labor Day has never been just another holiday,” Jackson told several hundred union members at a Southern Maine Labor Council event Monday in Portland. “Today, here with the people I’ve fought alongside for years, I

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STAFF PHOTO BY SOPHIA GERMER

Director Sonjia Brown-Joseph holds 9-month-old Archer Cooper and 6-month-old Rai'lynn Rhinehart at Clara’s Little Lambs Preschool in New Orleans on Friday. Brown-Joseph tells parents applying for childcare assistance not to count on it.

Parents face long waits for childcare assistance

Thousands in La. sitting on waitlist

BY PATRICK WALL, MORIAH BALINGIT and LAUREN COFFEY
Staff writer and Associated Press

Dynasty Bartholomew is determined to give her kids a better life. She started training this year to become a medical assistant, making the program’s honor roll while raising her three sons in Alexandria. While at school, she puts her 2-year-old in childcare — a necessity that, at \$720 a month, consumes most of her fixed income. She’s had to seek help from relatives and local nonprofits to pay her other bills. She is an ideal candidate for gov-

ernment-funded childcare assistance, which is supposed to enable needy parents to work or attend school without going broke. But eight months after Bartholomew was deemed eligible, she has yet to receive any aid. “I always call and check, and they always give me the same status,” she said. “I’m on the waiting list.” Childcare is notoriously expensive. Louisiana families who don’t receive subsidies report paying an average of \$11,000 annually per child — nearly as much as LSU’s in-state tuition. Childcare assistance, funded by the federal government with help from states, is meant to aid

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