



Voices of New Orleans Youth

How do New Orleans young people feel about their schools, neighborhoods, mental health and future lives?

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FOR NEW ORLEANS

Objective, rigorous, and useful research to improve students' experiences in schools and beyond.



OVERVIEW

New Orleans youth deserve to have their voices drive the decisions made by policymakers, community leaders, school leaders, and others who impact their lives. However, capturing diverse youth perspectives across the city is challenging. The Education Research Alliance for New Orleans (ERA-New Orleans) leads a coalition of school, community, and governmental leaders to survey youth about their opinions and experiences in New Orleans schools and neighborhoods. Now in its third edition, the New Orleans Citywide Youth Survey provides critical information about how our city's youth are doing inside and outside of school.

This report summarizes key results from the most recent survey, conducted during the 2024-25 school year. In addition to the questions related to students' school and neighborhood environments asked in prior years, we worked with our Steering Committee to ask new questions about other critical areas, including mental health, career aspirations and preparation, and youth neighborhood contexts. The most crucial points for each of our main topic areas are summarized below:

Supporting Students in Schools

- Students' **Growth Mindset Beliefs** have been consistently high, but their other **Academic Beliefs & Behaviors** remain lower than before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- New Orleans students consistently report lower **Teaching Quality** than students nationally, especially in **Caring and Classroom Management**.
- Black students have consistently reported worse **School Climate** than White students.

Preparing for the Future

- About 70% of New Orleans youth plan to graduate from college and middle school students have less uncertainty in their **Educational Expectations** than they did immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- New Orleans youth have **Career Aspirations** for professional jobs that require high levels of education, many in the growing area of healthcare. The other top industries in New Orleans do not align with the industries New Orleans youth aspire to.
- New Orleans youth have **Plans** to attend college and work at high rates, and have higher rates of wanting

to start a business than students nationally, especially for Black youth. However, they perceive their own motivation and academic achievement as **Challenges** to reaching their goals.

- New Orleans high school students have similar, and in some cases higher, **Career Preparation** opportunities than those reported by high school students across the country. However, New Orleans middle school students report lower job preparation experiences than students nationally.

Youth Experiences in Their Communities

- New Orleans youth have reported gradually improving **Perceptions of Neighborhoods**, but opinions differ based on where they live and their racial/ethnic background.
- Measures of **Youth Well-being** suggest that about one-third of New Orleans youth struggle with their mental health and many do not have the support they need, especially among Black youth.
- Youth in New Orleans have high **Social Media** usage and often turn to it for mental health support, especially among Black youth. They do not trust it as a source of **Information**.

The goal of this work is to provide an avenue for New Orleans youth to contribute to citywide decision-making. We aim for a New Orleans where all youth feel supported to pursue and succeed in achieving their hopes and dreams.

The remainder of this report is divided into three sections. The first summarizes findings related to supporting students in schools across topics and measures we have consistently measured, including **Academic Beliefs & Behaviors, Teaching Quality, and School Climate**. The second section examines **Educational Expectations, Career Aspirations, Plans & Challenges, and Career Preparation**. The last focuses on how to support youth in their communities, and includes items related to **Perceptions of Neighborhoods, Youth Well-being, and Social Media & Information**. In each section, we discuss the overall results, examine differences by race/ethnicity, and compare to prior years and national survey data where possible. The accompanying Technical Appendix includes youth responses across all items in the survey, including those we do not summarize in this report.

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BACKGROUND

The New Orleans Citywide Youth Survey program is a collaborative effort, led by [ERA-New Orleans](#), to capture critical information about the experiences of New Orleans youth. The members of our Steering Committee determine the topics for the survey, approve survey questions, help recruit participants, and assist in interpreting and disseminating the results. The full list of organizations that contributed to the third iteration of the Citywide Youth Survey is in the Acknowledgements section of this report.

Each iteration of the Citywide Youth Survey includes a core set of questions to track responses over time in youth Academic Beliefs and Behaviors, Educational Expectations, Teaching Quality, School Climate, and Perceptions of Neighborhoods, along with capturing youth background characteristics. The Steering Committee also proposes new topics to include in each survey, which the ERA-New Orleans team determines how to measure. Pilot surveys ensure the new questions are valid and do not add too much time to the survey administration. For the 2024-25 survey, we added questions about Youth Well-being, Career Aspirations and Preparation, and Social Media usage.

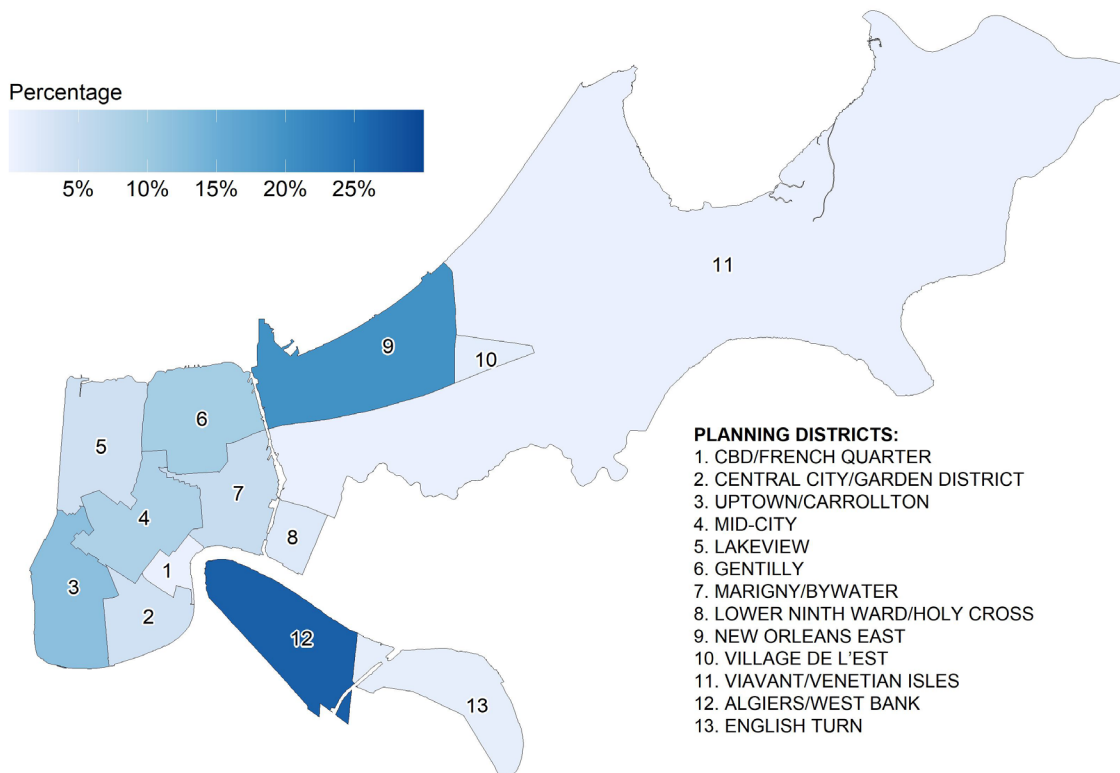
Both the core questions and added ones are drawn from existing surveys that have been previously validated, increasing confidence in the survey design and potentially providing national comparisons. For example, the Teaching Quality questions were adapted from instruments developed by Education Elements, a national organization that partners with school districts to design and administer perception surveys and support school improvement. Education Elements

provided average responses from a large national sample of districts, allowing comparisons of New Orleans students' perceptions with national benchmarks. New questions on students' mental health were largely drawn from the federal Centers for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). For more information on the survey items and their sources, see the Technical Appendix.

In this survey round, we invited all middle and high schools, including private schools, within Orleans Parish to participate. While there was interest from private schools in the survey, we were unable to obtain enough participants to include their responses in this report. Here, we focus on responses from the 16 publicly funded schools in New Orleans that administered the survey to about 2,000 of their 6th through 11th grade students from March through May of 2025. This sample represents fewer schools and lower response rates within schools on average than in 2021-22. We performed analyses to ensure the students who responded to the survey are representative of the population of students enrolled in New Orleans schools overall and found that we have a lower proportion of Black students and a higher proportion of White students. The results presented here use weights to correct for this potential bias in responses but generally results are consistent with and without weighting. More details on the sample, its representation of New Orleans students, and the weighting procedure are in the Technical Appendix.

We also added questions in this survey about where youth live. Specifically, we asked students to select their Planning District and, within that, their neighborhood, by looking at a set of city maps. We obtained responses from youth across all Planning Districts, as shown in Figure 1, with a high concentration of youth in the West Bank and New Orleans East. Our survey sample aligns with the population of youth overall across the city. More information is available in the Technical Appendix.

Figure 1: The Citywide Youth Survey sample contains youth across all Planning Districts in New Orleans, but respondents are concentrated in New Orleans East and Algiers/Westbank



Note: Darker blue shading indicates that a higher percentage of survey respondents live in the area.

To understand the results of the 2024-25 survey, we must consider how the New Orleans school and community context has evolved over time. Despite experiencing sizable declines in test scores after the COVID-19 pandemic, students in New Orleans have almost completely made up for their losses, [achieving at similar levels](#) as students from across the state. Students across Louisiana also have [improved](#) more in recent years than students in other states. Our [survey in 2021-22](#) found improvements in students' perceptions of Teaching Quality but declines in their Academic Beliefs and Behaviors since before the COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, this report examines whether these areas have returned to where they were before COVID-19 or remain at similar levels as in 2021-22.

In addition, the [population of students](#) and number of public schools in New Orleans has declined in recent years, and the demographic characteristics of the student population have shifted. Since the [first survey in 2018-19](#), the percent of Black students has declined by 10 percentage points, while the percent of Hispanic students has increased 5 percentage points, and the percent of White students has increased 3 percentage points. In addition, there has been a small decline in the proportion of students from economically disadvantaged families and a small increase in the proportion of English Language Learners. (See Technical Appendix). These are important factors to consider when interpreting differences in the results over time.

We use caution in determining the trends over time to ensure they are capturing meaningful differences in the experiences of New Orleans students overall and not just differences in the kinds of students who responded to our survey. We only indicate a change in survey responses between 2024-25 and prior years if it fits the following criteria:

- The difference in response percentages is at least 3 percentage points.
- We see a similar trend among schools that participated in all survey rounds.
- The responses are significantly different in regression models that control for student background characteristics.

We use a similar procedure to determine differences in responses by students' race/ethnicity. We also add an additional step to understand whether any racial/ethnic differences we find are related to characteristics of schools. There is persistent racial/ethnic segregation of schools in New Orleans, and most urban cities, where White students are more likely to attend higher-rated schools and those with fewer economically disadvantaged students. We extend our analyses to control for school letter grade and the percent of economically disadvantaged students in the school. If these additional contextual elements reduce the racial/ethnic gaps, we take this as evidence that the gaps are partially driven by differences in the kinds of schools Black, Hispanic, and White students in New Orleans attend. More details about our methodology are available in the Technical Appendix.

To make the often-complicated survey scales more understandable for a broad audience, we use a few strategies. First, for almost all items, we de-

fine higher values as more positive. Survey items that were initially worded negatively are adjusted so the negative responses are highlighted and we report the item in the positive direction. For example, for the item "Students at this school are often bullied" we report the percent of students who disagreed with this statement and define the topic as "Absence of Bullying".

Second, we combine students' responses across all questions within a given dimension to display the percent of affirmative responses. For example, students had five response options for the five questions about their Growth Mindset Beliefs: totally untrue, mostly untrue, somewhat true, mostly true, totally true. Looking at all responses to every item, we calculate how often students agreed with the statements by selecting either "mostly true" or "totally true". More details on the individual items and how we report them are included in the Technical Appendix.



SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS

Most discussions of the quality of schooling focus on the easily measured outcomes, such as test scores and graduation rates, but these do not capture the elements that contribute to these outcomes, including students' Academic Beliefs and Behaviors, Teaching Quality, and their perceptions of their School Climate. In this section, we summarize the main results for these topics, discuss trends over time, illuminate any racial/ethnic differences, and compare to national trends where possible.

Academic Beliefs & Behaviors

Students' beliefs about their abilities, their motivation to learn, their ability to focus on schoolwork when needed, their perceptions of the value of school, and their time spent in school all contribute to their learning, growth, and academic achievement. These are core areas of the New Orleans Citywide Youth Survey that we have included in all three survey rounds.

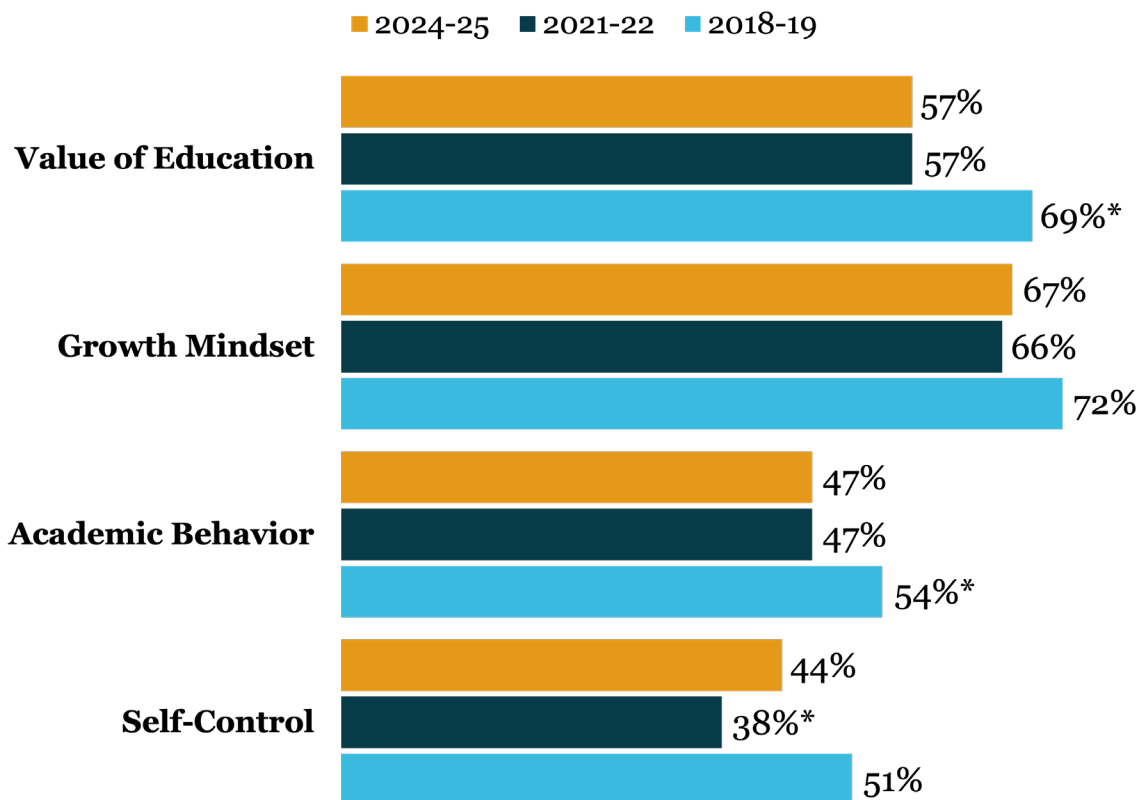
Figure 2 displays how student responses to these survey items have evolved over time. Students

have reported high Growth Mindset Beliefs, or beliefs that their abilities are malleable and can be changed by effort and hard work, over time. Students' ability to regulate their behavior (Self-Control) declined to 38% in 2021-22 after the COVID-19 pandemic, but has since increased to 44%. However, students' perceptions of whether their education is preparing them for their future lives (Value of Education) and the effort they put into their schoolwork (Academic Behavior) declined significantly after the COVID-19 pandemic and have remained at this lower level since then.

Students have consistently reported high Growth Mindset Beliefs and reported higher Self-Control than in 2021-22. Their Academic Behavior, beliefs in the Value of Education, and Attendance remain lower than before COVID-19.



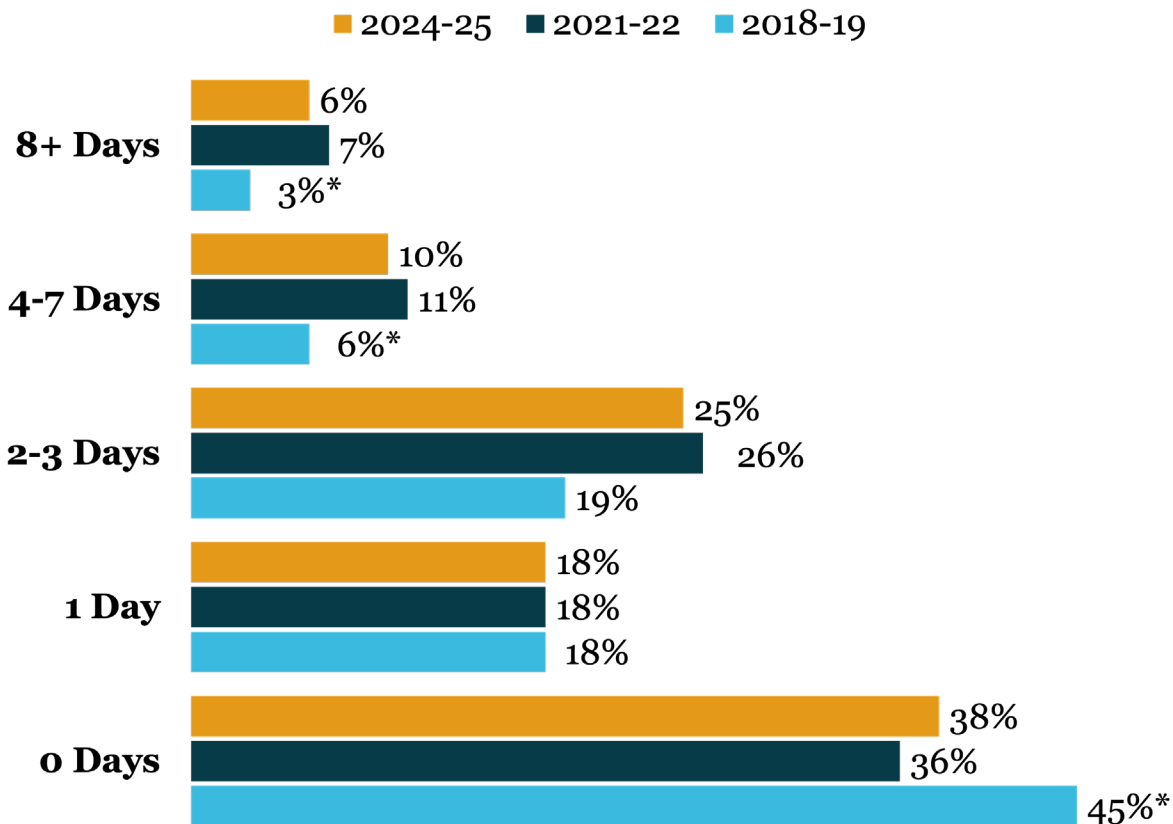
Figure 2: Self-Control increased in 2024-25, but Academic Behavior remains low



Note: * indicates responses are significantly different ($p < .05$) from those found in the most recent survey year (2024-25).

Another area that has not improved is Attendance. In New Orleans, and across the country, attendance rates declined after the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 3 displays trends in students’ reports of the number of days of school they missed in the month preceding the survey. In 2018-19, 45% of students reported missing zero days of school in the month preceding the survey. In 2024-25, this dropped to 38%, and reports of missing eight or more days of school remain twice as high as they were before the COVID-19 pandemic. This may be because when schools transitioned to virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, they had to design infrastructure to allow students access to information and the ability to submit assignments and learn without being in the classroom. Many schools have kept this same infrastructure, which could mean that missing school has less of an impact on student outcomes, but attendance is required by law for many and improves the learning experience for most students. School attendance may also be important for non-academic outcomes.

Figure 3: Student reports of absences remain higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic



Note: Attendance rates are indicated by the number of days students missed in the 30 days before taking the survey. * indicates responses are significantly different ($p < .05$) from those found in the most recent survey year (2024-25).

These results are somewhat surprising considering the improvement in New Orleans student academic outcomes in recent years. However, they were not a surprise to educators we spoke with. One described student Academic Beliefs & Behaviors as “stickier” than other aspects of education, meaning that they are more challenging to improve in a short period of time. While schools may have been able to add additional instruction and tutoring to help students catch up on tested material, students’ perceptions of the value of education, effort, and attendance are harder to change.

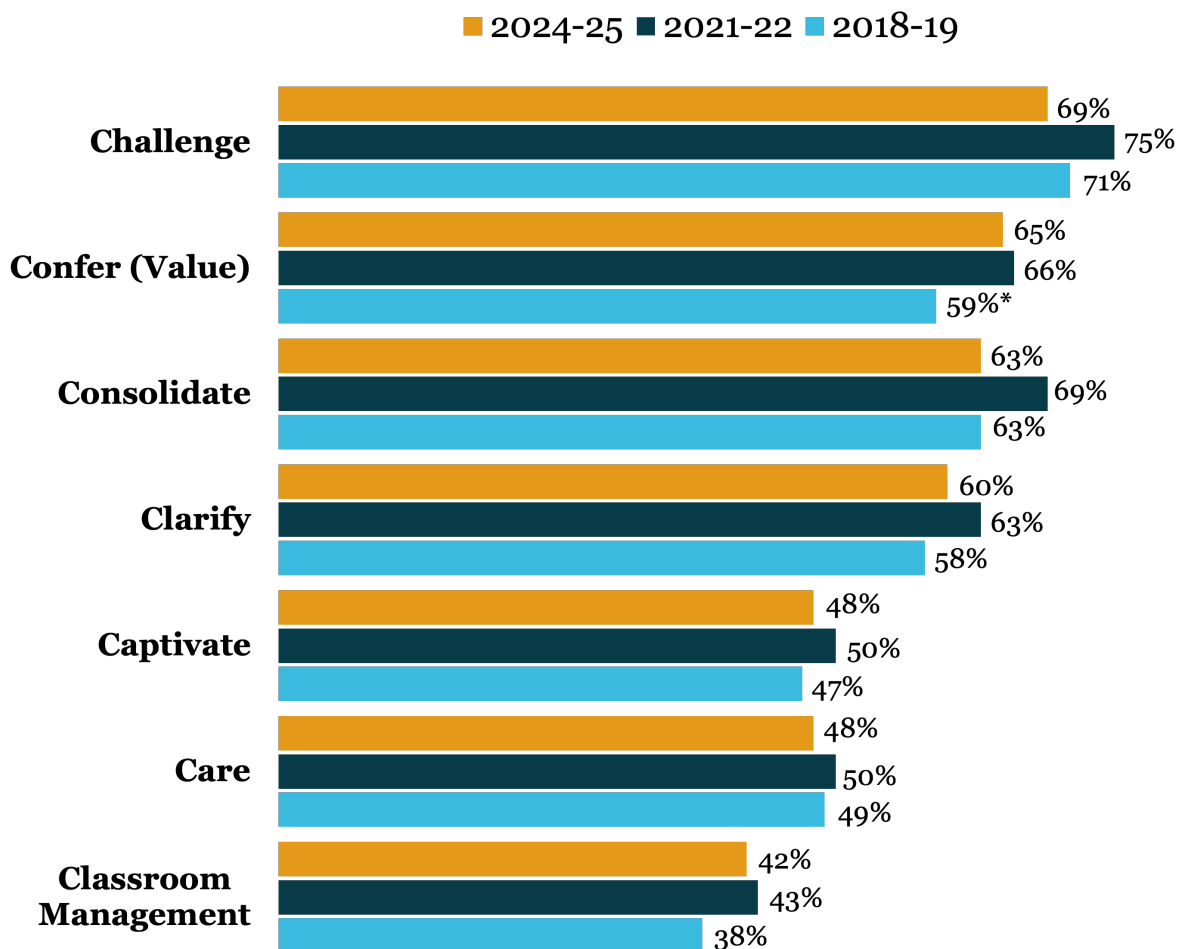
Overall, these results suggest that New Orleans students are still recuperating from the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of their beliefs about the Value of Education, their Academic Behavior, and their Attendance, but there have been improvements in students’ Self-Control.

Teaching Quality

To examine students’ experiences in the classroom, we use Education Elements’ 7 C’s measures, which capture students’ perceptions of the academic demand and support from teachers. The most effective classrooms balance challenging students to achieve at their highest level while providing encouragement and assistance to students to reach that level. As shown in Figure 4, New Orleans students consistently report that teachers Challenge them, help to Consolidate information, and Value students’ contributions to the class. Students rated teaching more highly during the COVID-19 pandemic (2021-22), consistent with national trends, but only perceptions that teachers Value students’ contributions remained significantly higher than in 2018-19.

Other aspects of Teaching Quality have been consistently low. Relatively few New Orleans students feel that their teachers Care about them, spark and maintain their interest in learning (Captive), and foster orderly and respectful classroom behavior (Classroom Management). The improvement in Classroom Management we reported during the last youth survey administration has remained consistently above what was originally reported in 2018-19, but still less than half of students report high Classroom Management.

Figure 4: Students consistently reported that their teachers Challenge them and help them to Consolidate information, but reported lower perceptions of Care and Classroom Management



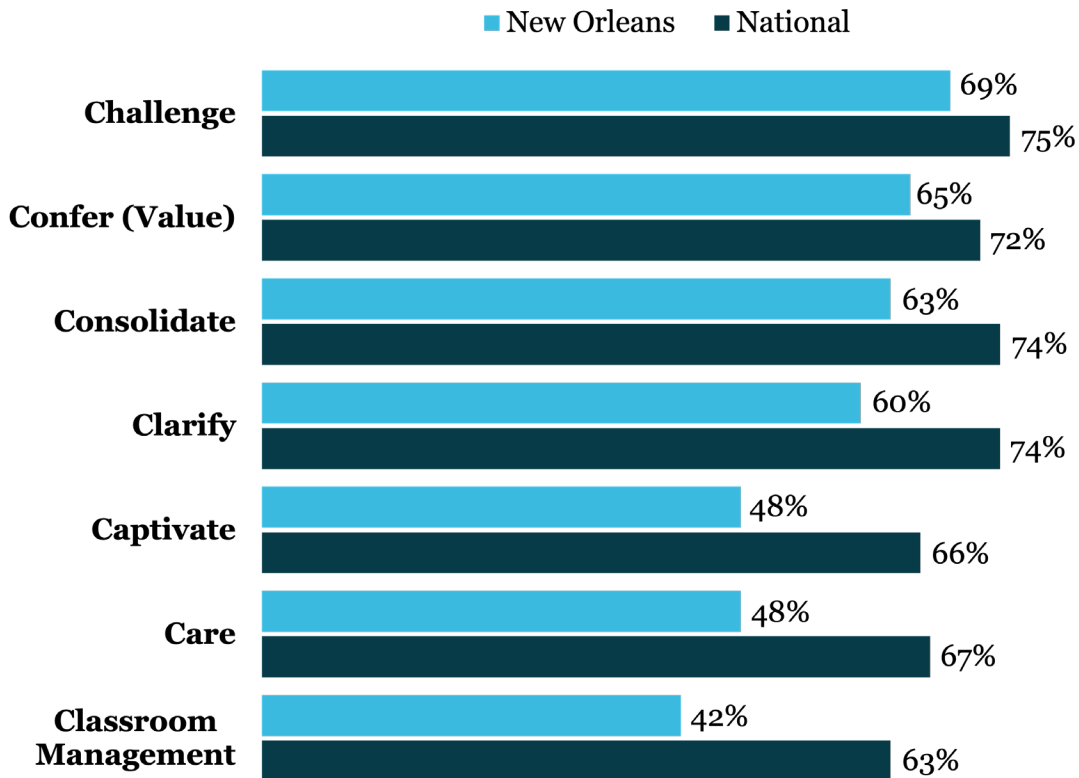
Note: * indicates responses are significantly different ($p < .05$) from those found in the most recent survey year (2024-25).

We compared New Orleans students’ responses to those found nationally, using data collected by Education Elements in the 2018-19 youth survey report and again for this survey round. The areas where New Orleans students report the lowest perceptions of Teaching Quality – Care, Classroom Management, and Captivate – are also the ones New Orleans students report almost 20 percentage points lower than students nationally, as shown in Figure 5. Although New Orleans teachers appear to challenge students, value their contributions, and help them consolidate information, they still do so at lower rates than teachers nationally. The national estimates provided by Education Elements come from schools with a higher percentage of White and Asian students than in New Orleans schools. However, estimates drawn from Education Elements schools with similar racial/ethnic composition of New Orleans schools are the same as the national estimates. We describe these comparisons more in depth in the Technical Appendix.

New Orleans students have consistently reported lower Teaching Quality than students nationally, especially in Caring and Classroom Management.



Figure 5: New Orleans students report lower Teaching Quality than students nationally



Note: National estimates are from aggregate responses across all schools that Education Elements administered these survey items to in 2023-24.

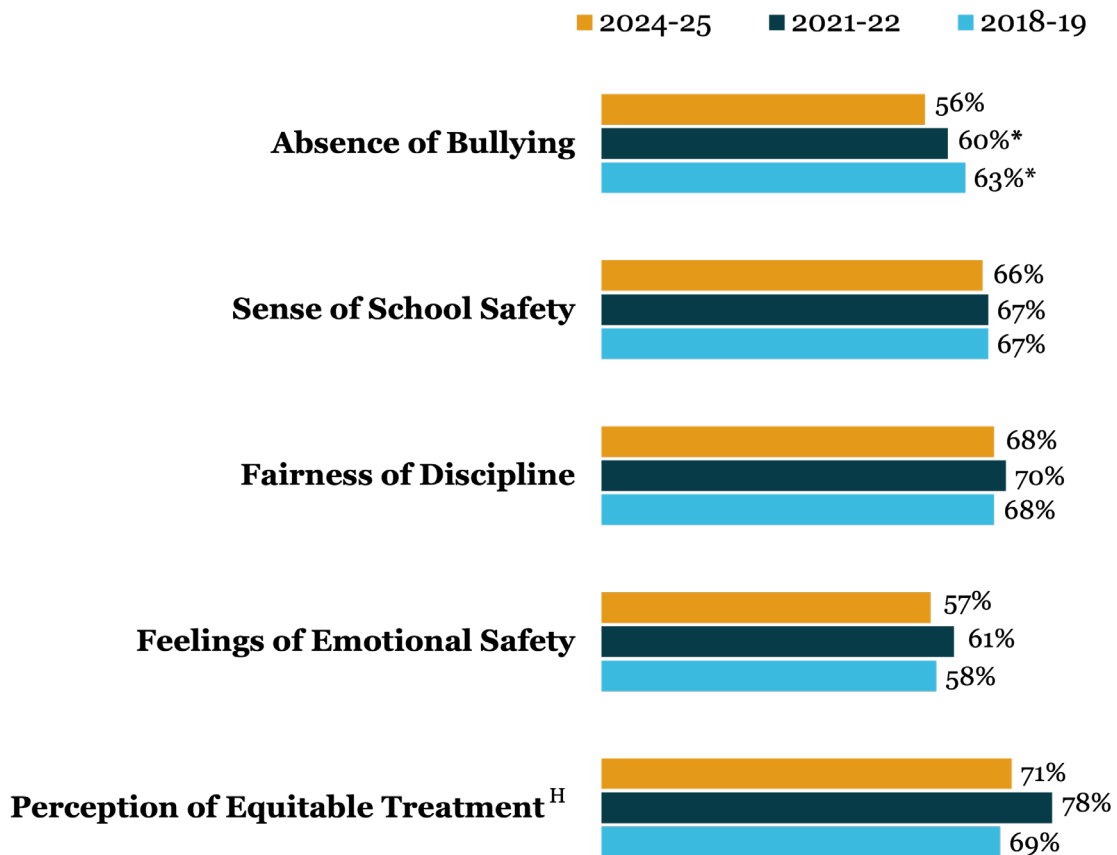
Overall, there are few differences in the perceptions of Teaching Quality among Black, Hispanic, and White students, except for one category: Classroom Management. Only 39% of Black students reported that their teachers fostered orderly and respectful classroom behavior, compared with 51% of Hispanic and White students. When we consider the school achievement level and composition of students by socioeconomic status, the difference between Black and White students decreases and is no longer statistically significant. We take this as evidence that differences in reports of Classroom Management by race/ethnicity are due to Black and White students attending different kinds of schools in New Orleans and not because Black and White students within similar schools perceive Classroom Management differently.

School Climate

We have consistently asked students to report how they feel about their physical and emotional safety within schools, school policies on discipline, the climate of bullying, and the treatment of students from different backgrounds (only asked of high school students).

As shown in Figure 6, these items have been mostly positive and consistent over time. Around 70% of students feel safe in their schools (Sense of School Safety), perceive that discipline is fair (Fairness of Discipline), and believe students are treated similarly regardless of their background (Perception of Equitable Treatment). However, fewer students feel safe from bullying (Absence of Bullying) and feel like they belong in their schools (Feelings of Emotional Safety).

Figure 6: Students reported positive School Climates over the years, but there is an increased perception of bullying in schools

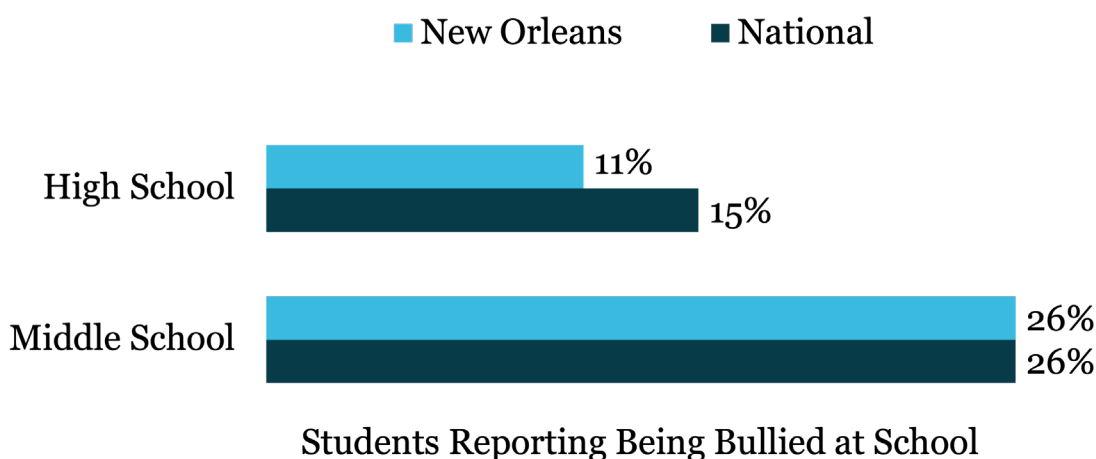


Note: * indicates responses are significantly different ($p < .05$) from those found in the most recent survey year (2024-25). The superscript H signifies the question was only asked to high school students.

The Absence of Bullying is the only item that has gotten slightly worse over time. While this item captures students’ perceptions of the climate of bullying in a school, it does not indicate whether students have been bullied themselves. To help understand the connection between the climate of bullying and its impact on student experiences in schools, our Steering Committee added a question this year that asks students to report on their personal experiences with bullying and cyberbullying. Overall, 18% of students reported being bullied in school and 13% of students reported being cyberbullied. There are

large differences by school level. As shown in Figure 7, middle school students in New Orleans reported more than twice the rate of bullying than high school students. These are similar to reports of bullying nationally, as measured by the National Center for Education Statistics, except New Orleans students report lower levels of bullying in high school than students nationally.


Figure 7: New Orleans middle school students report higher rates of bullying than high school students, consistent with national trends



Note: National comparison data are drawn from the 2022 School Climate Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey by the National Center of Education Statistics.

Not surprisingly, students who have experienced bullying report a worse Climate of Bullying in their schools. While about 60% of students who haven’t experienced bullying report a school climate absent of bullying, only 42% of students who have experienced bullying report a school climate absent of bullying. These results provide evidence that our measure of the Climate of Bullying is aligned with personal reports of bullying. The perceptions of a Climate of Bullying may be related to witnessing others being bullied and fears of the potential of being personally bullied. It is also possible that increased attention to school bullying in the community and media contributes to students’ perceptions.

Black students report worse Physical and Emotional Safety, Climate of Bullying, and Equitable Treatment in schools than White students.

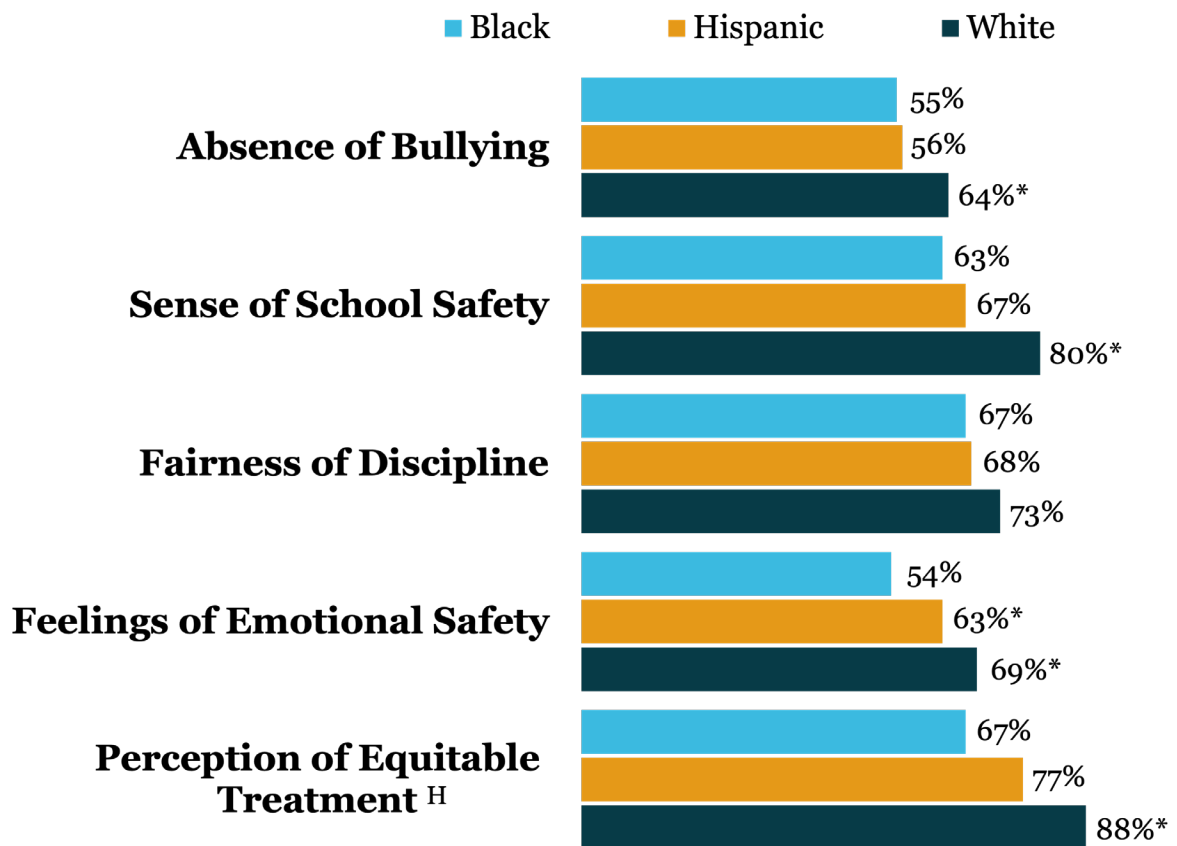


Black students in New Orleans have consistently reported worse School Climate than White students. As shown in Figure 8, Black students perceive a worse climate of bullying, less school safety, lower levels of belonging, and unequal treatment compared to White students. Hispanic students reported similar perceptions of School Climate as Black students in most areas except for emotional safety; Black students reported lower levels of belonging than Hispanic students.

However, when we consider differences in the level of achievement and composition of economically disadvantaged students among schools, these gaps decline. The only School Climate item that still appears to be significantly different by race/ethnicity among students in similar high schools is Perceptions of Equitable Treatment. These results suggest that most of the inequality in perceptions of school climate between Black, Hispanic, and White students are due to differences in the kinds of schools these students are enrolled in. White students in New Orleans

public schools are more likely to attend schools with a lower proportion of economically disadvantaged students and higher student achievement than Black and Hispanic students.

Figure 8: Black students report worse School Climate than White students



Note: Significant differences between Black students and Hispanic and White students are indicated by * ($p < .05$). The superscript H signifies the question was only asked to high school students.

These results, among measures we have included in all rounds of the Citywide Youth Survey, point to areas for growth in supporting students in schools. New Orleans youth have made great progress in academic learning to make up for the learning loss experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, but we find a lingering impact in students' beliefs about the Value of Education, motivation, and Attendance rates. While students on average feel challenged and valued by teachers, fewer than half feel supported by their teachers in the classroom. School Climate has

mostly been consistent over time, except in bullying where students perceive that students are teased or picked on frequently. Differences in the kinds of schools Black, White, and Hispanic students attend contribute to gaps in whether students feel safe in schools. We next turn to analyses investigating New Orleans youth's aspirations for the future and the support they need to achieve their goals.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Given changes in state policy, career opportunities, and higher education over the years, there is new interest in understanding what youth hope to achieve for their future lives and the kinds of support they need to reach their goals. In previous survey rounds, we asked students to report on the highest level of education they think they will earn. In the current iteration, the Steering Committee added extensive questions about students' Plans for right after high school, their perceived Challenges, and their Career Aspirations and Preparation. These questions provide broader understanding of what New Orleans students' hopes and fears are for the future.

are now more certain about how far they think they will get in school, with only 15% responding "Don't Know" in 2024-25 compared with 24% in 2021-22. We do not have similar measures of Educational Expectations among high school students in 2021-22.

Most New Orleans youth plan to graduate from college and middle school students have less uncertainty in their Educational Expectations than immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among Black students.

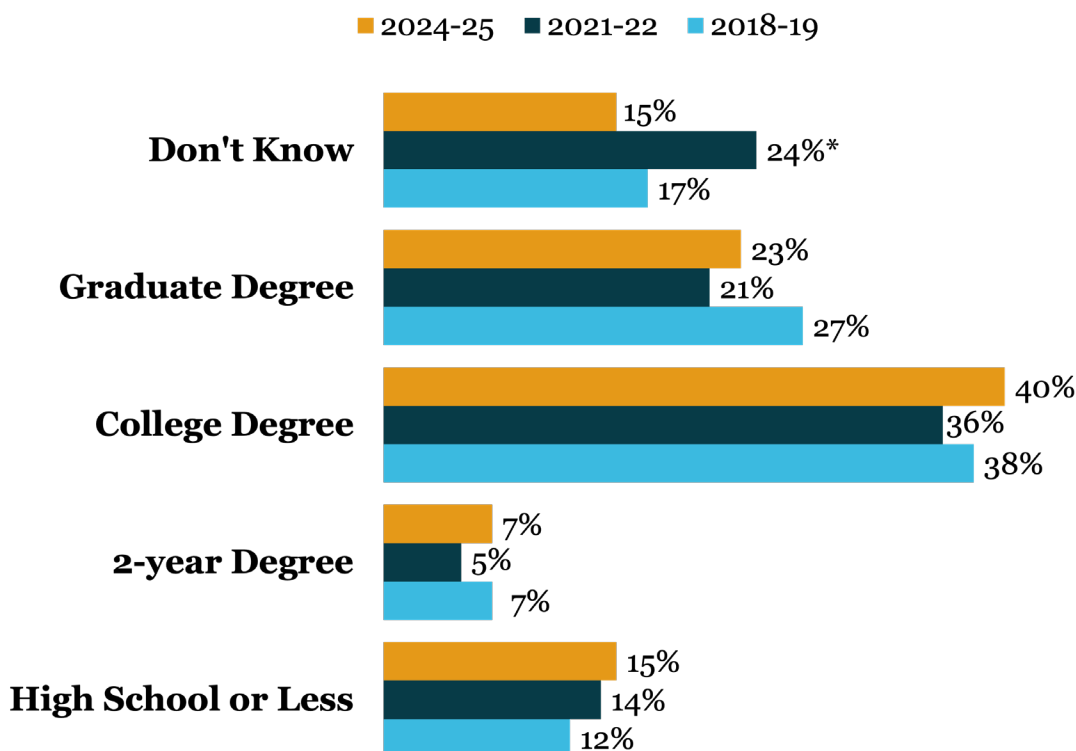


Educational Expectations

Overall, about 70% of students expect to earn a bachelor's degree or above, which is similar to what we found in the initial survey in 2018-19. These high Educational Expectations did experience a dip after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among middle school students, we found improvements in their Educational Expectations since 2021-22, as shown in Figure 9. Middle school students

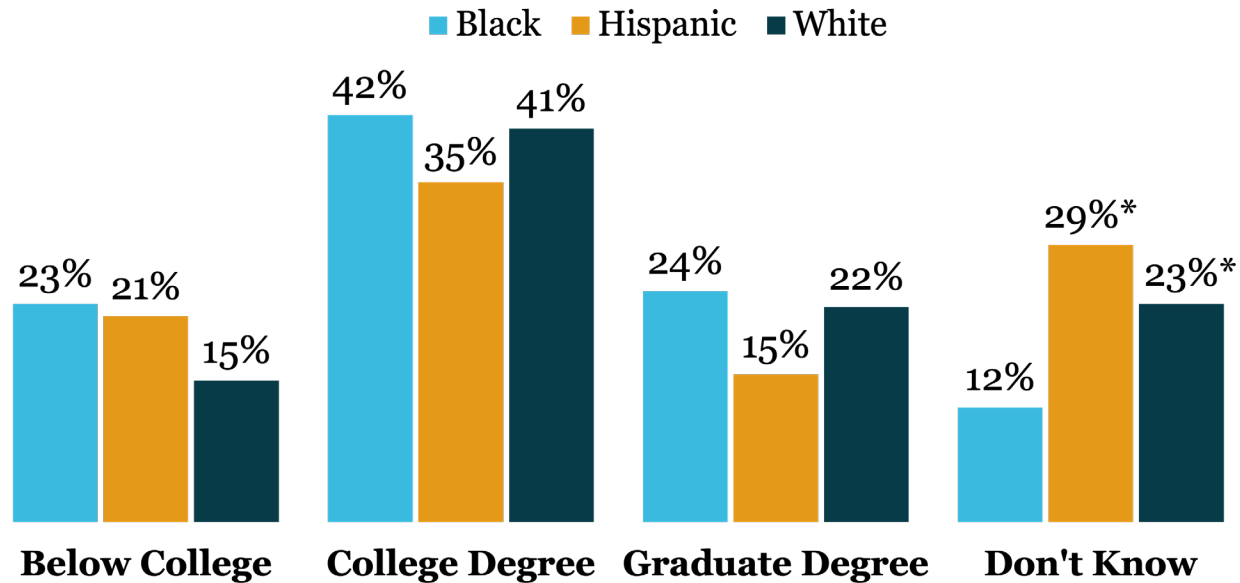
Figure 9: Middle school students are more certain about their Educational Expectations than in 2021-22



Note: * indicates responses are significantly different ($p < .05$) from those found in the most recent survey year (2024-25).

We also examined racial/ethnic differences in students’ Educational Expectations. Figure 10 shows that all middle school student groups have high expectations to graduate from college or graduate school, but Black middle school students are more certain about their Educational Expectations. White and Hispanic middle school students reported they “Don’t Know” the level of education they expect to receive at twice the rate of Black students, as shown in Figure 10. On average, Hispanic middle school students reported the highest uncertainty about their Educational Expectations and lower rates of earning a college or graduate degree.

Figure 10: Among middle school students, Black students are more certain about their Educational Expectations than White and Hispanic students



Note: Significant differences between Black students and Hispanic and White students are indicated by * ($p < .05$).

Among high school students, the patterns differ. On average, about half of White students expect a graduate degree compared with 32% of Black students and 33% of Hispanic students. However, these differences are explained by students’ school context, as White students are more likely to attend schools with higher academic achievement and fewer economically disadvantaged students. We do not see this same sensitivity of results in middle school where racial differences remain even after controlling for school context.

Overall, New Orleans youth are less uncertain about their Educational Expectations than immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among Black youth, and have high expectations to earn a bachelor’s degree or above. These high expectations are notable given that only 38% of students reported having a mother with a bachelor’s degree. On average, [about 65%](#) of New Orleans students enter col-

lege in the first year after high school, potentially due to the strong [college-going culture](#) among New Orleans schools.

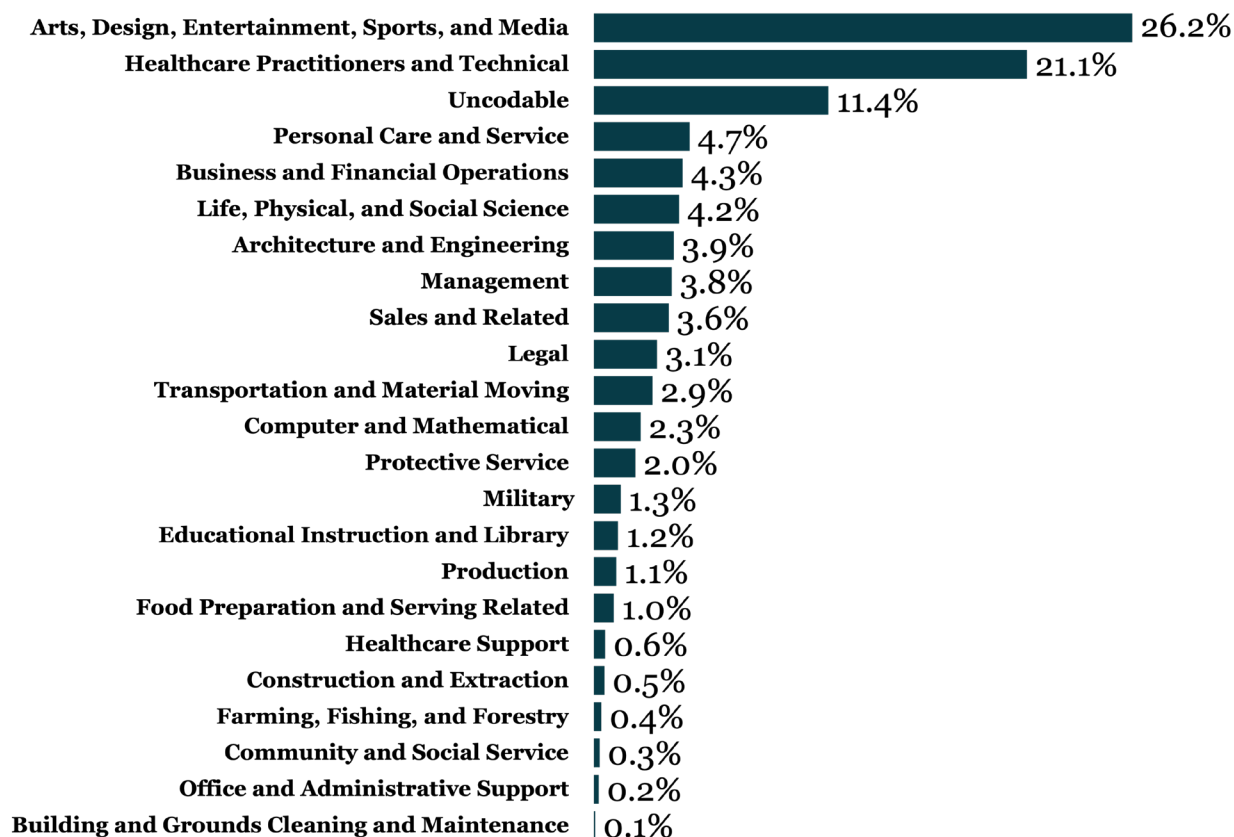
Career Aspirations

For the first time, we also asked students to report the careers they dream to achieve later in life. Specifically, we asked them, “If you could have any job in the world, what would you want to do?” Students could write in their response in any way they chose, and our team sorted and categorized responses to determine the top careers. While 23% of students named two careers, our analyses here focus only on the first career listed. The top five careers listed among students were athlete (12%), doctor (10%), entrepreneur (8%), artist (7%), and nurse (6%).


To provide a better comparison between these student responses and the career context they are in, we matched the responses to broad categories of occupations within the Standard Occupational Classification System (SOC) and industries within the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). While these broad categories of occupations and industries mask the unique responses by students, they provide an avenue to connect these responses to career opportunities and training in New Orleans.

Figure 11 displays the proportion of students who listed each occupation. The top occupation categories are Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media (dominated by athletes and artists) and Healthcare Practitioners (dominated by doctors and nurses). The next largest occupation groups listed by students are Personal Care and Service (mostly barbers and hairdressers) and Business and Financial Operations (mostly entrepreneurs).

Figure 11: New Orleans youth aspire to diverse careers, but the top careers are in Arts & Sports Occupations and Healthcare Practitioners



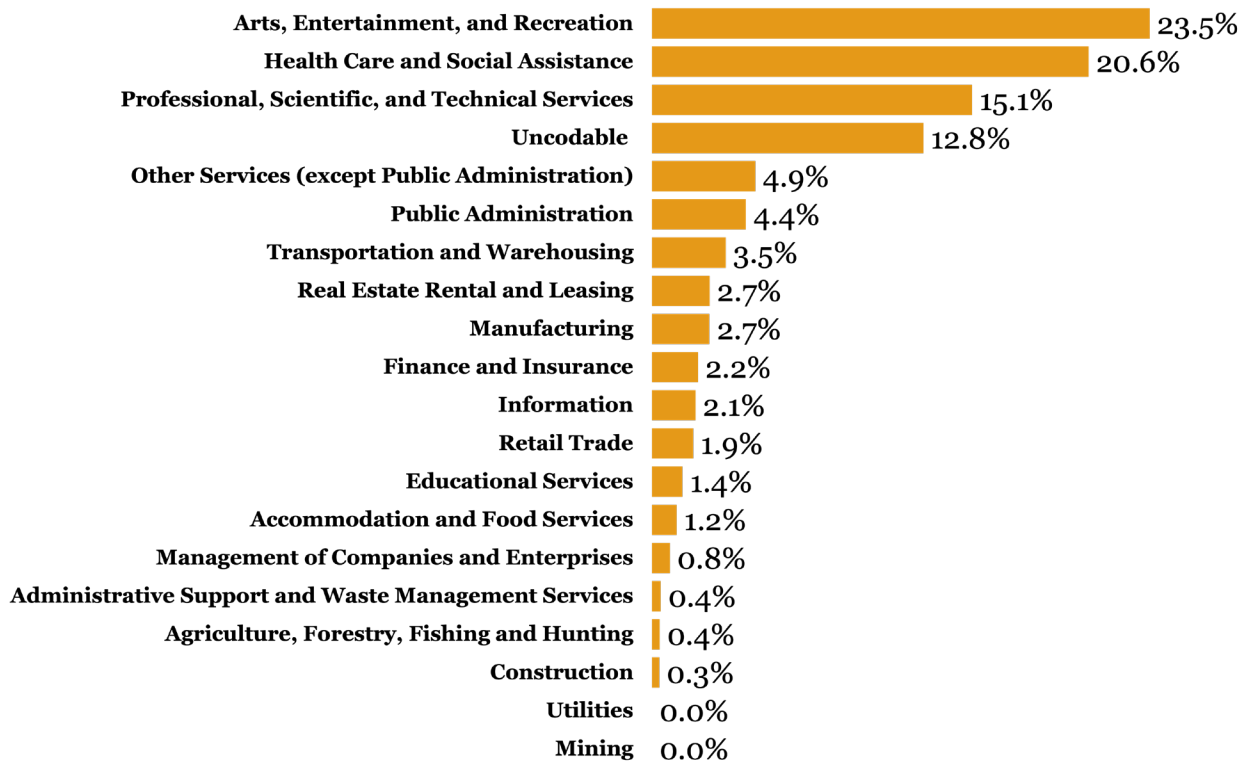
New Orleans youth have Career Aspirations for professional jobs that require high levels of education, many in the growing area of healthcare. The other top industries in New Orleans do not align with the industries New Orleans youth aspire to.



According to analyses done by the [Louisiana Data Center](#), the top industries in New Orleans are Hospitality and Tourism, Health Services, and Water Transportation. Healthcare is a growing area within New Orleans that offers the potential for high-paying, sustainable employment. However, it appears the other industries leading the labor market do not align with youth aspirations. For example, only about 1.2% of youth want to work in Accommodations and Food Services and 2.9% want to work in Transportation and Warehousing.

Figure 12 displays a similar pattern among the industries associated with the careers students aspired to. Arts and Recreation, Healthcare, and Science are the main industries New Orleans youth aspire to enter.

Figure 12: Most New Orleans youth aspire to enter Arts and Recreation, Healthcare, and Scientific industries



As shown above, we could not classify around 12% of responses within the SOC or NAICS systems, because students listed more about the characteristics of the job they wanted rather than the actual job. We found that, among these, about half the students wanted a job that supported a high quality of life and another quarter wanted a career where they can help people. For example, one student wrote, “Any job with a stable high pay to support my family” and another wrote, “Something that gets me rich because I don’t want to suffer.”

These results suggest that New Orleans youth have high Career Aspirations and aspire to jobs that can provide a good quality of life, yet the occupations and industries available in New Orleans may not align with their hopes for the future.

Plans & Challenges

New Orleans youth plan to attend college at similar rates and start a business at higher rates than students nationally but perceive their own motivation and grades as barriers to their success.



We now turn to two new questions we added to this survey round to understand how youth plan to reach these expectations and what supports they need to pursue their goals. For both questions, students could select all items that they felt applied to them.

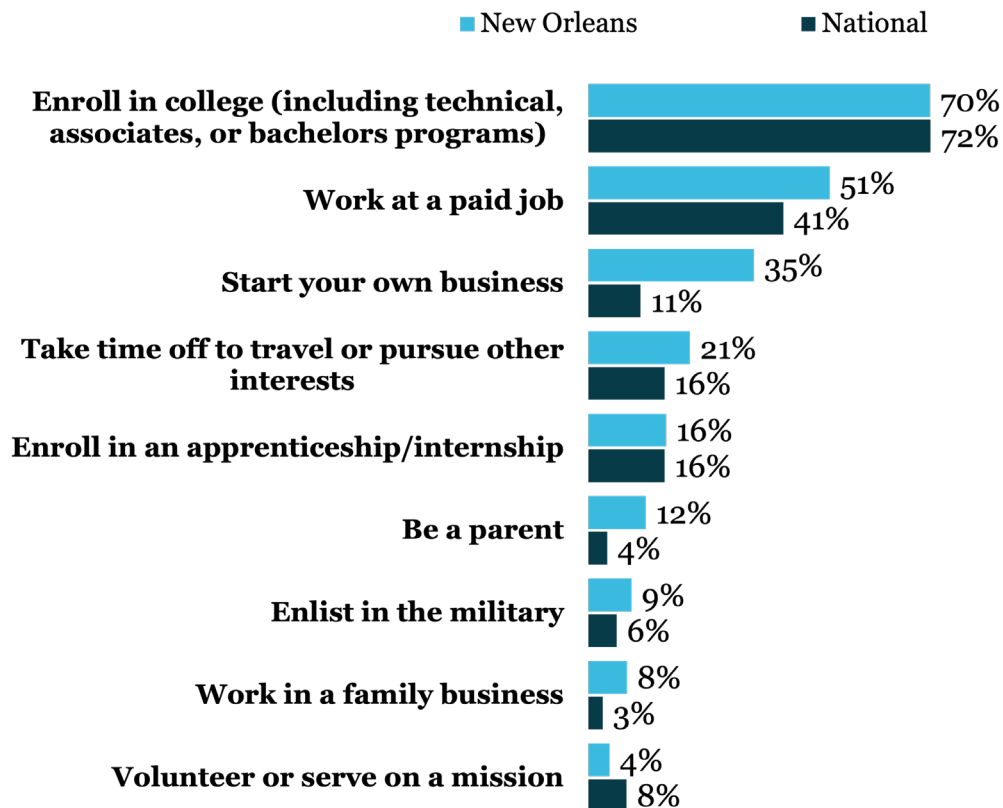
First, we asked youth to report what they plan to do in the first year after high school, as shown in Figure 13. This question was drawn from a national survey of youth conducted by Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation (Gallup-Walton), which allows us to compare the responses among New Orleans students to those nationwide. Overall, 70% of New Orleans youth plan to enter college in the first year after high school, which is similar to youth nationally. Breaking this down into the type of college, the majority (53%) of New Orleans youth plan to enter a 4-year college in the year after high school, followed by 16% who plan to enter a 2-year college to earn an associate’s degree, and 11% who plan to enter a technical training program. The next highest category youth selected was to work at a paid job, which 51% of New Orleans youth selected, compared with 41% of youth nationwide.

Given the high percentage for these two items, we examined how they overlap. About half of New Orleans students who plan to enter a 4-year college after high school also plan to have a job, and about half of the students who plan to have a job after high school also plan to enter a 4-year college. These findings highlight the importance of students graduating high school both college- and career-ready, as students expect to have to work while in college, but not to let that derail them from reaching their high Educational Expectations.

One area where New Orleans students reported much higher rates than students nationally is in entrepreneurship. About 35% of New Orleans youth plan to start their own business in the first year after high school, compared with only 11% of youth nationally. We also find differences by race/ethnicity; about 40% of Black youth reported wanting to start their own business, compared with 30% of Hispanic youth and only 14% of White youth. These results align with [recent reports](#) on entrepreneurship in New Orleans in

general, which finds we have one of the highest rates of Black small business ownership in the country. These patterns could relate to the key point in the prior section; without opportunities within the New Orleans economy to pursue their dreams, New Orleans youth may perceive starting their own business is the only or best route. Providing support for New Orleans youth to build successful businesses will be critical to ensure these aspiring innovators contribute effectively to the small business community in New Orleans.

Figure 13: New Orleans youth plan to go to college at similar rates and plan to start a business at higher rates than students nationally

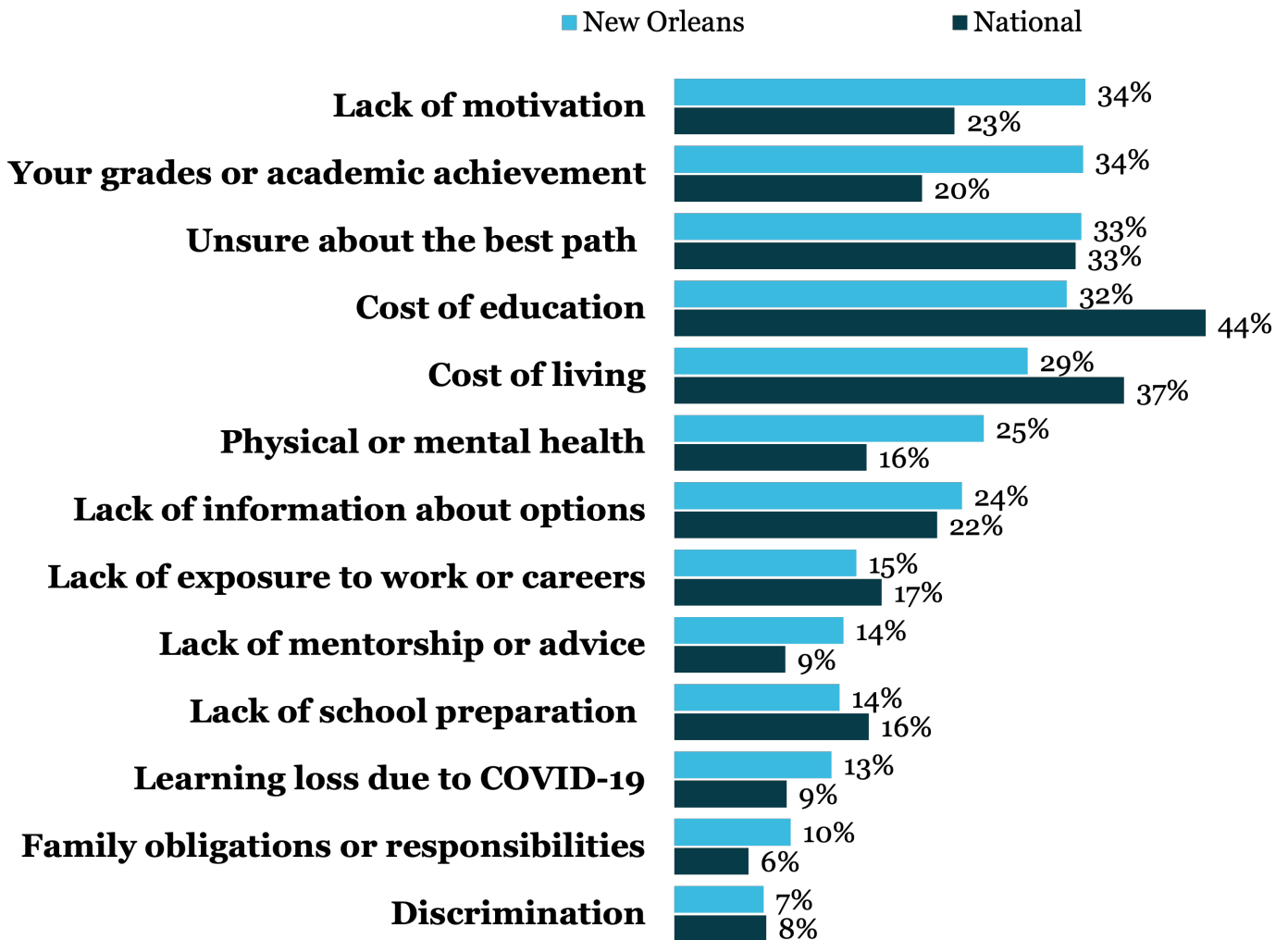


Note: National comparison data are drawn from the 2024 Gallup-Walton Voices of Gen Z poll, combining responses among 12- to 17-year-olds.

Next, we asked youth to report what Challenges they fear will keep them from pursuing their Educational and Career Aspirations. Figure 14 displays the results from New Orleans youth, compared with those nationally, drawn from the Gallup-Walton survey. The top barriers selected by New Orleans youth are a lack of motivation and their academic achievement, suggesting they fear internal barriers more than external ones. Youth nationally selected these items at lower rates than New Orleans youth. About a quarter of New Orleans students also perceive their physical or mental health as a challenge in reaching their dreams, compared with only 16% of students nationally. In addition, 33% of New Orleans youth are unsure about the best way to pursue their dreams, which is consistent with youth nationally.

The costs of education and living—external challenges—are also perceived barriers for New Orleans students, but less frequently than students nationally. By focusing on areas that they have more control over, New Orleans youth may be able to overcome external factors that get in their way. However, this may also mask important structural barriers to success that no amount of motivation or grades can overcome.

Figure 14: The top barriers to pursuing goals among New Orleans students are their motivation, academic achievement, and uncertainty about the path forward, which differs from youth nationally



Note: National comparison data are drawn from the 2024 Gallup-Walton Voices of Gen Z poll, combining responses among 12- to 17-year-olds.

Overall, youth across New Orleans perceived similar Challenges by race/ethnicity, except in two areas. Black youth reported much higher concerns about their grades or academic achievement than White and Hispanic youth. Only 19% of White youth and 25% of Hispanic youth mentioned this as a challenge to reaching their goals, compared with 38% of Black youth. These differences remain when we consider students' school context, suggesting that even Black youth in similar schools are more concerned about their own motivation and academic achievement compared with White students. In addition, Hispanic youth reported family obligations as a challenge to reaching their goals about 18% of the time, compared with only 8% of Black youth and 6% of White youth.

These questions provide context to what New Orleans youth aim to pursue after high school and what areas they perceive to need the most support in. Ensuring that students have confidence in themselves and reach high levels of achievement appears to be critical areas for supporting their goals of entering college, securing jobs, and creating their own businesses.

Career Preparation

We also examined the kinds of career training opportunities New Orleans students have in their schools. The first question was drawn from the Gallup-Walton survey and asked students to select all career training opportunities available to them in their schools. As shown in Figure 15, New Orleans middle school students report many fewer opportunities for career training than high school students. For example, 67% of high school students in New Orleans claim their schools offer opportunities to learn about different types of careers, compared with only 38% of middle school students.

New Orleans high school students report similar, and in some cases more, Career Preparation opportunities as students nationally. However, middle school opportunities lag behind those reported by students nationally.

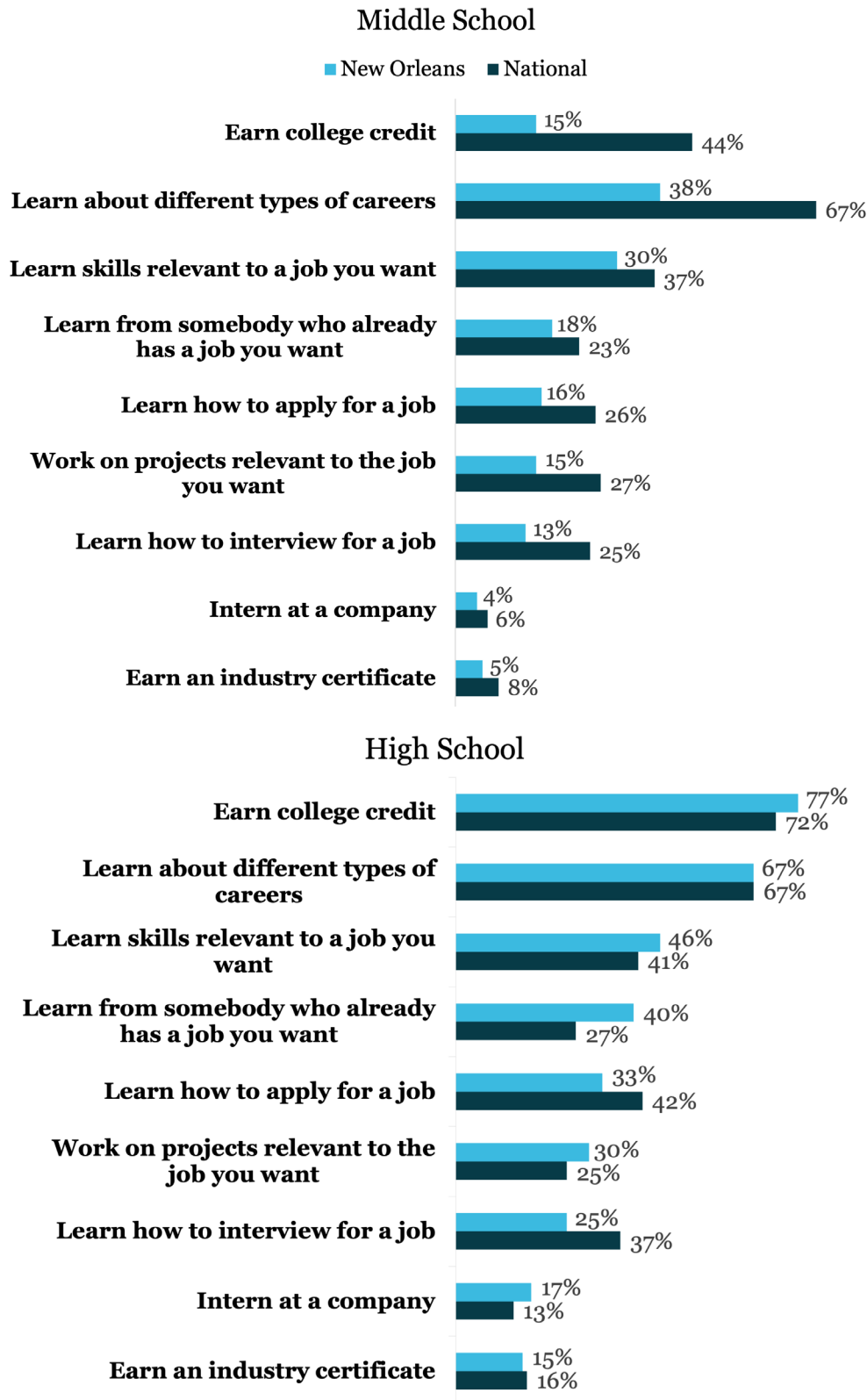


Many New Orleans high school students reported they have opportunities to earn college credit (77%), learn about careers they are interested in (67%), and learn skills relevant to a job they want (46%). Informal mentorship by someone with the job of interest is higher in New Orleans (40%) than among high school students nationally (27%).

Although we may expect high schools to focus more on Career Preparation than middle schools, it appears that New Orleans middle schools have fewer opportunities than middle schools nationally. About a quarter of middle school students across the country report that their school offers opportunities to learn from someone who has a job you want, to learn how to apply and interview for jobs, and to work on projects related to their career interests. Only 13-15% of New Orleans middle school students report having these opportunities.



Figure 15: New Orleans youth report fewer job training opportunities in middle schools than in high schools, but the gap is larger in New Orleans than in schools nationally



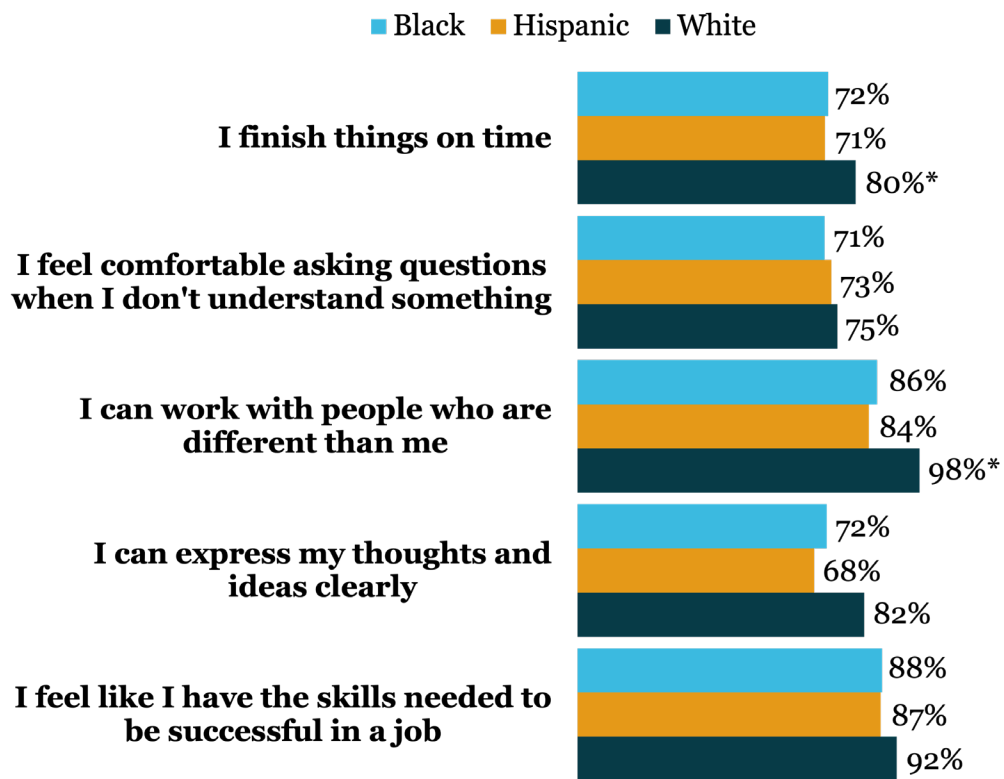
Note: National comparison data are drawn from the 2024 Gallup-Walton Voices of Gen Z poll.

We also asked New Orleans youth whether they feel they have various workplace skills, derived from a survey administered to youth aged 9-18 by the Boys & Girls Clubs of America. We found that 87% of youth perceive they have skills needed to be successful in a job and about three-quarters of youth reported that they can express their thoughts clearly, feel comfortable asking questions when they do not understand something, and finish things on time. While these results suggest that most New Orleans youth feel prepared to enter the workplace, their responses reflect lower preparation than those reported by youth nationally.

In Figure 16, we display the percent of youth who agreed they have various career skills by race/ethnicity, where we find two differences. White students were more likely to say they finish things on time and can work with people different than them compared to Black and Hispanic students.

Taken together, our survey results suggest that New Orleans youth have high expectations for their educational and occupational attainment, and many work-relevant skills. Youth not only need support in training for careers, but also in building confidence in their abilities to reach their dream jobs.

Figure 16: New Orleans youth report high career skills, but there are a few differences by race/ethnicity



Note: Significant differences between Black students and Hispanic and White students are indicated by * ($p < .05$).

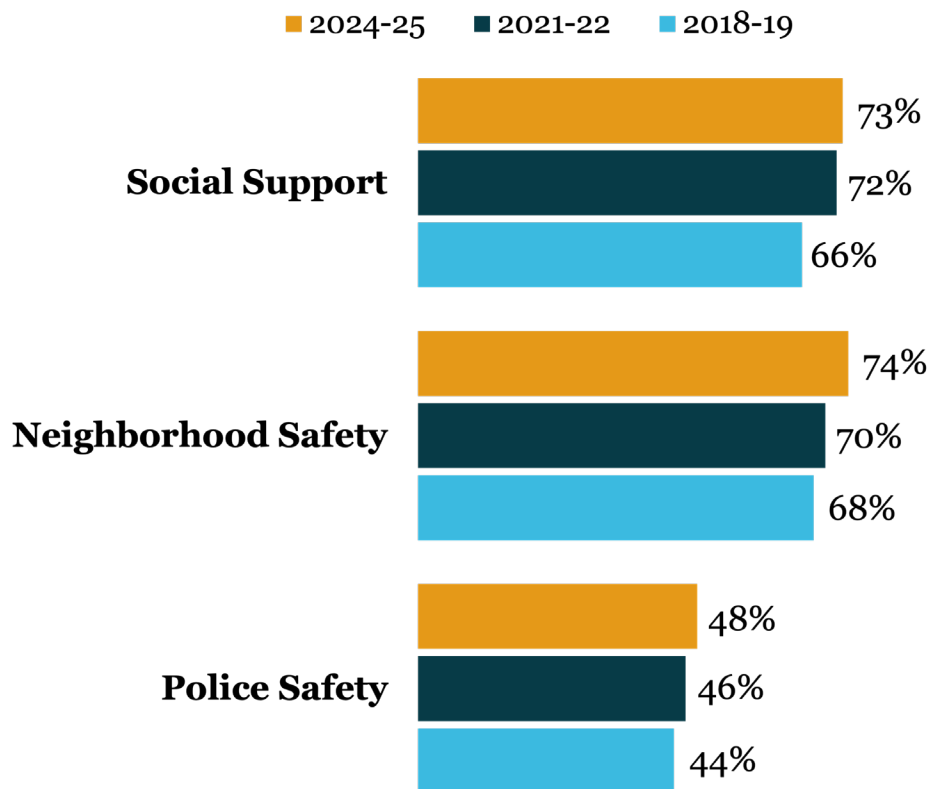
YOUTH EXPERIENCES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

Students' experiences outside of school greatly influence their learning and achievement and how they can contribute to the community at large. Neighborhood context for youth in New Orleans is even more important to understand, as they often live far away from their schools. For the first time, we asked students to report the neighborhood they live in. In the survey, all participants selected their planning district from a map displaying the borders and names of the 13 Planning Districts in New Orleans. As noted in the background section, the proportion of youth in each Planning District in our survey aligns with the population of youth across New Orleans. We found that only 38% of students live in the same Planning District as their school and 10% of students live within the same neighborhood as their school. This section summarizes results that help us understand youth perceptions of their neighborhoods and the support they have for their mental health.

We start by examining the trends in items we have consistently asked across survey years, including neighborhood and police safety and social support. Figure 17 shows that youth perceptions of their neighborhoods have improved slightly over time, with about three-quarters of youth reporting they feel safe and supported in their neighborhoods, and about half of youth reporting they feel safer in the presence of police in 2025.

Perceptions of Neighborhoods

Figure 17: New Orleans youth have better perceptions of Social Support than in 2018-19



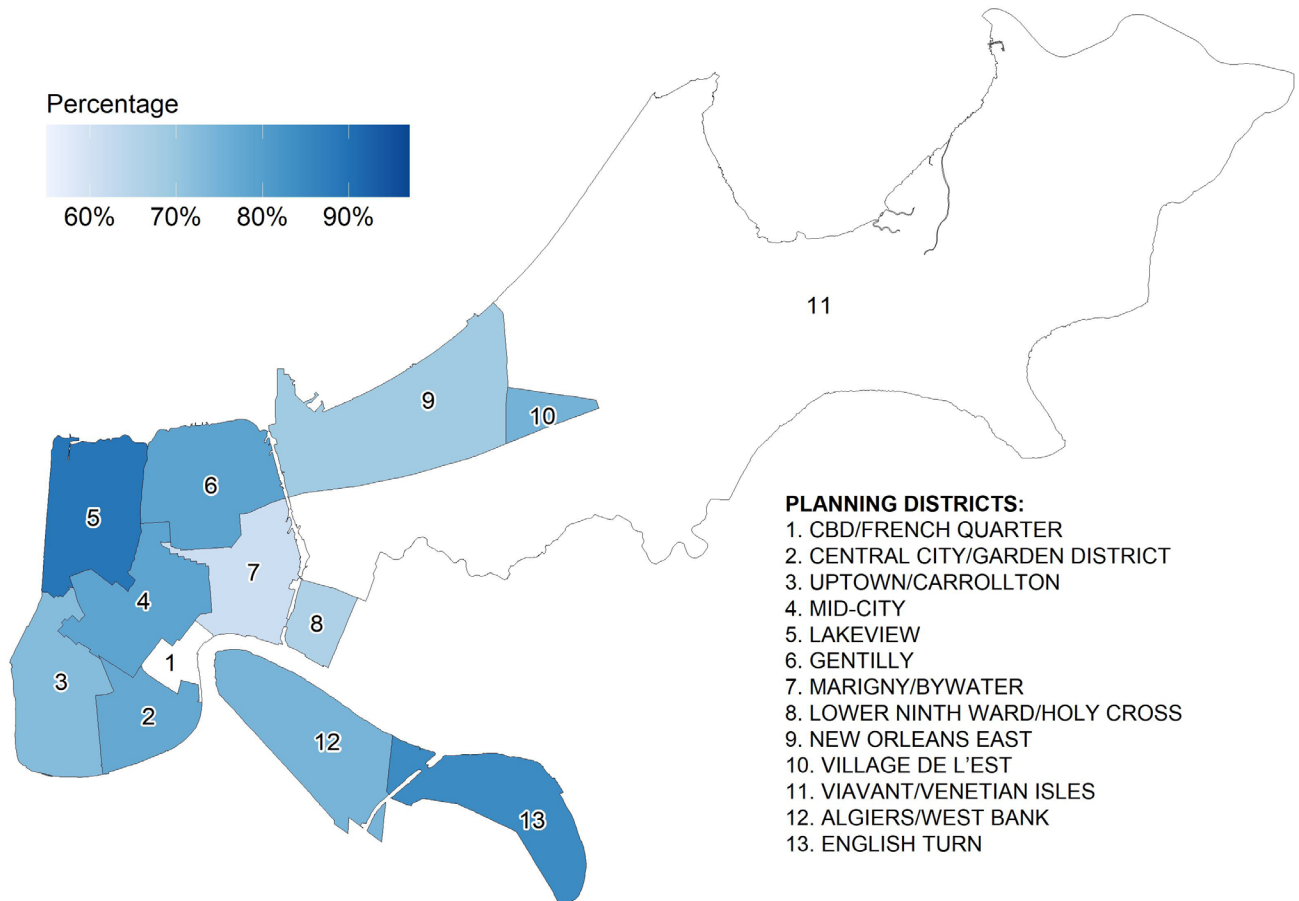
These citywide results mask important differences between neighborhoods in these measures. To get a deeper picture of the ways youth environment relates to their experiences in their communities, we examine differences by Planning District. We exclude any Planning Districts from these analyses that did not have an adequate number of youth responses to ensure their views represent the youth in that area (see more details in the Technical Appendix).

Youth perceptions of their Neighborhoods have gradually improved over time but vary by Planning District.



We find wide differences in how youth perceive their Neighborhood Safety and Social Support across areas of New Orleans. As shown in Figure 18, 89% of youth living in Lakeview reported feeling safe, compared with only 61% of youth living in the Marigny/Bywater. The composition of these Planning Districts by socioeconomic status may be driving these associations, as Lakeview on average has residents with higher incomes and educational attainment than the rest of New Orleans.

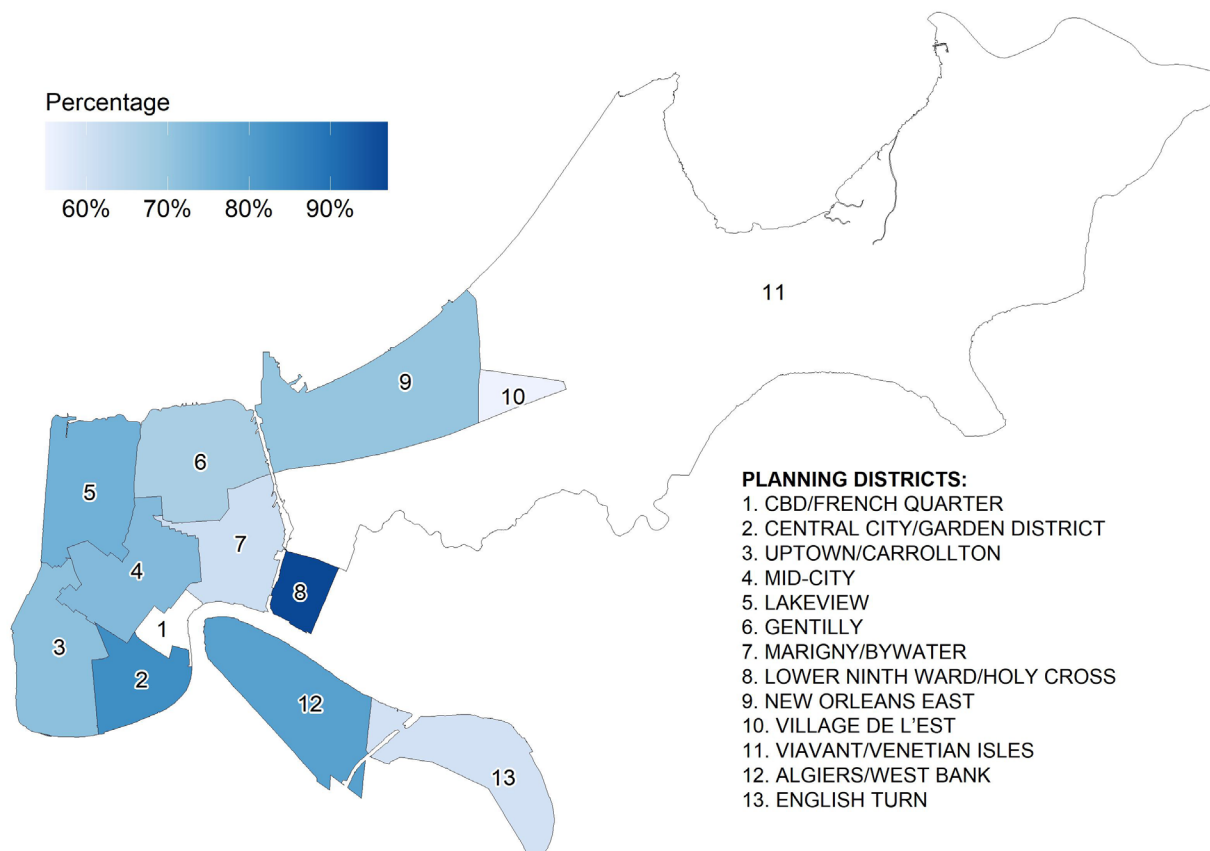
Figure 18: The percent of students who report feeling safe is highest in Lakeview and lowest in the Marigny/Bywater



Note: Darker blue shading indicates higher Neighborhood Safety. The Planning Districts in white (CBD/French Quarter and Viavant/Venetian Isles) did not have enough youth responses to display their data.

Youth reports of feeling supported by their community also differed by Planning District in ways less aligned with socioeconomic status. As shown in Figure 19, the Planning District with the highest level of Social Support also has residents with lower incomes and educational attainment than the rest of New Orleans. Youth living in Lower 9th Ward/Holy Cross reported very high levels of Social Support, with 96.7% of students claiming they have adults in their lives they can rely on. However, only 55% of youth living in Village de L’Est reported feeling supported. We do not find large differences in perceptions of Police Safety across Planning Districts.

Figure 19: The percent of students who report feeling supported by adults in their community is highest in the Lower 9th Ward and lowest in Village de L’Est

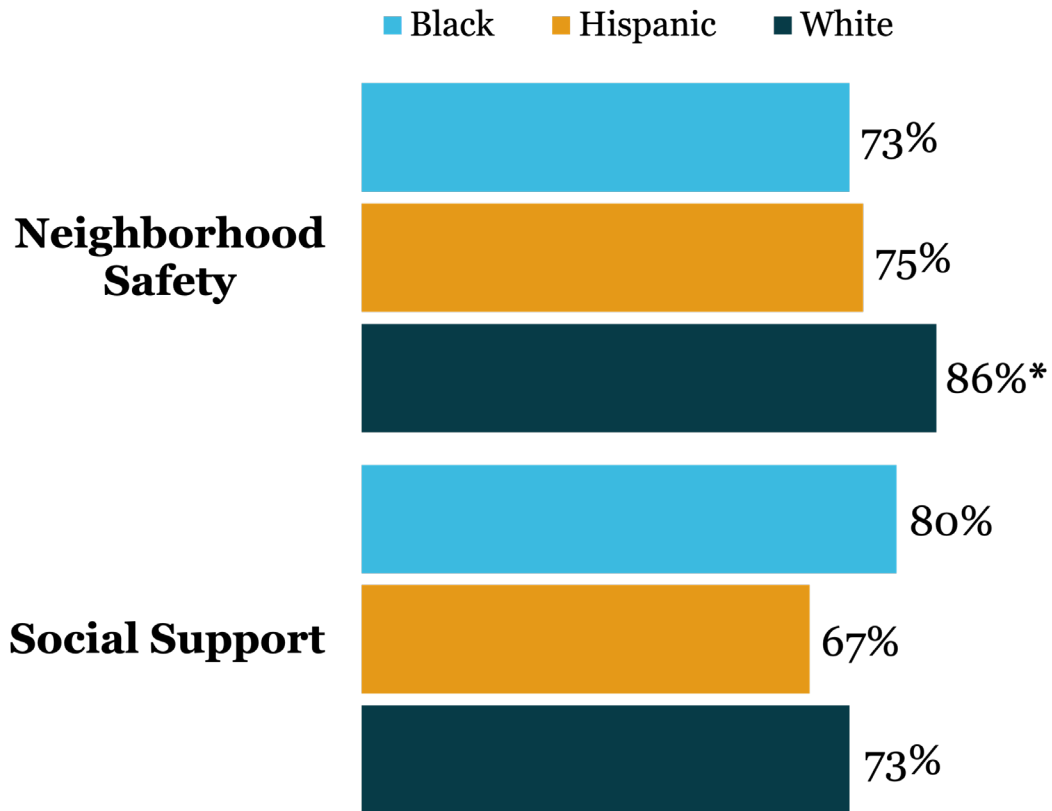


Note: Darker blue shading indicates higher social support. The Planning Districts in white (CBD/French Quarter and Viavant/Venetian Isles) did not have enough youth responses to display their data.

Youth from different racial/ethnic backgrounds experience their neighborhoods in diverse ways. We find that Black students report the highest levels of Social Support, but the lowest levels of Neighborhood Safety, as shown in Figure 20. On average, 86% of White students report feeling safe in their neighborhoods, compared with 73% of Black students and 75% of Hispanic students. On the other hand, 80% of Black students report having adults in their lives they can depend on, compared with only 73% of White students and 67% of Hispanic students. These racial/ethnic differences remain even when we compare

youth living in the same Planning District. It may be that differences in where Black, Hispanic, and White youth live at the smaller neighborhood level contributes to these gaps.

Figure 20: Black and Hispanic students report worse Neighborhood Safety than White students



Note: Significant differences between Black students and Hispanic and White students are indicated by * ($p < .05$).

Youth Well-being

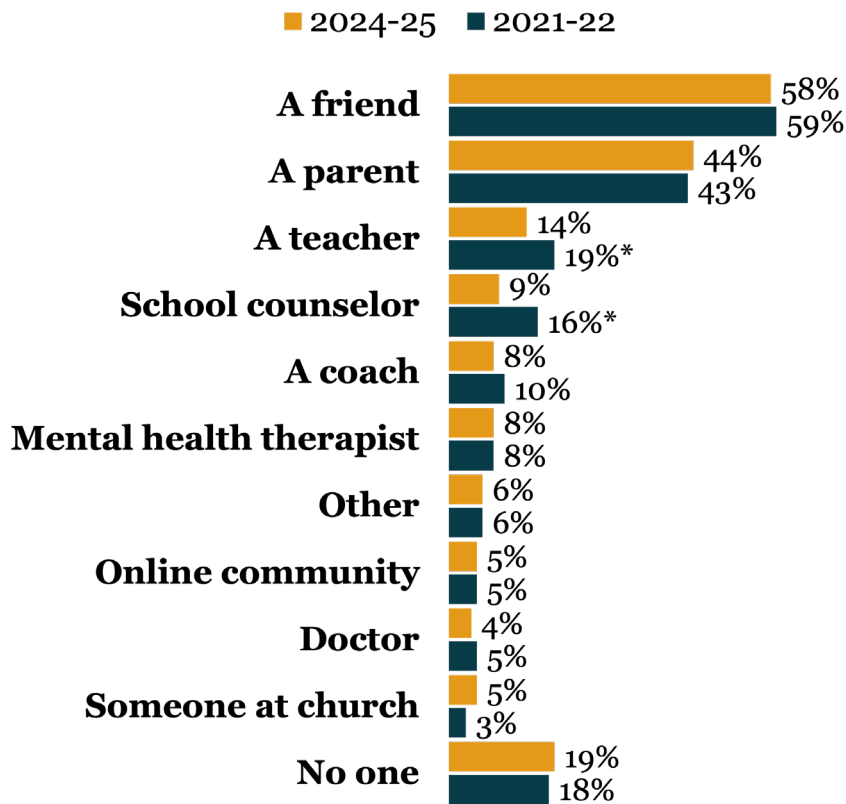
An area of increasing concern in New Orleans, and nationwide, is youth mental health and well-being. Nationally, rates of depression and anxiety have increased among adolescents in recent years. In the 2021-22 survey, we included questions to understand whether adolescents feel they have the mental health support they need. In 2024-25, we added questions to get a better sense of the overall mental health needs among New Orleans youth and additional information about whether they have unmet needs.

We start by examining trends in who youth appear to trust when looking for mental health support and find few changes since the last survey round. About 56% of students think that adults at their schools understand their mental health needs, which is consistent with reports from 2021-22. When asked who they are most likely to reach out to if they are struggling, the majority of youth claim that they would

reach out to a friend, followed by a parent, as shown in Figure 21.

On average, fewer students claimed they would reach out to a member of their school community, such as a teacher or counselor. Consistent with our last youth survey report, 19% of youth say they would not reach out to anyone if they were overwhelmed or stressed.

Figure 21: Most New Orleans youth would reach out to a friend if struggling, and 19% would reach out to no one, which has been consistent with the last survey round



Note: * indicates responses are significantly different ($p < .05$) from those found in the most recent survey year (2024-25).

Three additional questions this survey round attempt to understand barriers to youth receiving mental health support. The first question gauges unmet needs among New Orleans youth and finds that 26% of youth needed counseling at some point over the last year but did not receive it.

The second question was designed by the Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council to tackle stigma in the community around mental health. It asks, “Have you ever been afraid to seek help for your mental health because of what others may think?” As shown in Figure 22, more than half of New Orleans youth have avoided mental health support at some point due to fears of what others think, and 23% currently are not getting support because of these fears.

The last question asks youth to report where they have received support or help in the past 30 days, allowing them to check all that apply. While about a quarter of youth said they did not need support in the last 30 days, the remaining three-quarters report-

ed receiving support in person (51%), over the phone (40%), through a video call (28%), and through social media (25%). Taken together, these results provide important information about where youth currently reach out for mental health support and areas where the community could improve the support available.

About 40% of New Orleans youth reported depressive symptoms and a quarter reported needing mental health support and not receiving it; Black youth report higher rates of both than White youth.




Figure 22: More than half of New Orleans youth were in need of mental health support at some point and did not receive it



To better design services to meet the needs of New Orleans youth, we need to have a sense of the spread of the problem. While asking adolescents to self-report their experiences with depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues may not capture the rate of true diagnoses, it gives youth the opportunity to claim their own needs without requiring them to go to a doctor or counselor. Rates of mental health diagnoses are generally lower than the actual prevalence of issues, and unequal by race/ethnicity and family income because more advantaged youth have [greater access](#) to medical professionals.

(32%) youth reported high levels of anxious behavior, as shown in Figure 23. We added two questions created by the Centers for Disease Control, also shown in Figure 23. About 41% of New Orleans youth report symptoms of depression and about 22% report that they have bad mental health most of the time. These results indicate that, on average, about one third of New Orleans youth are struggling with their mental health, which is consistent with [national trends](#).

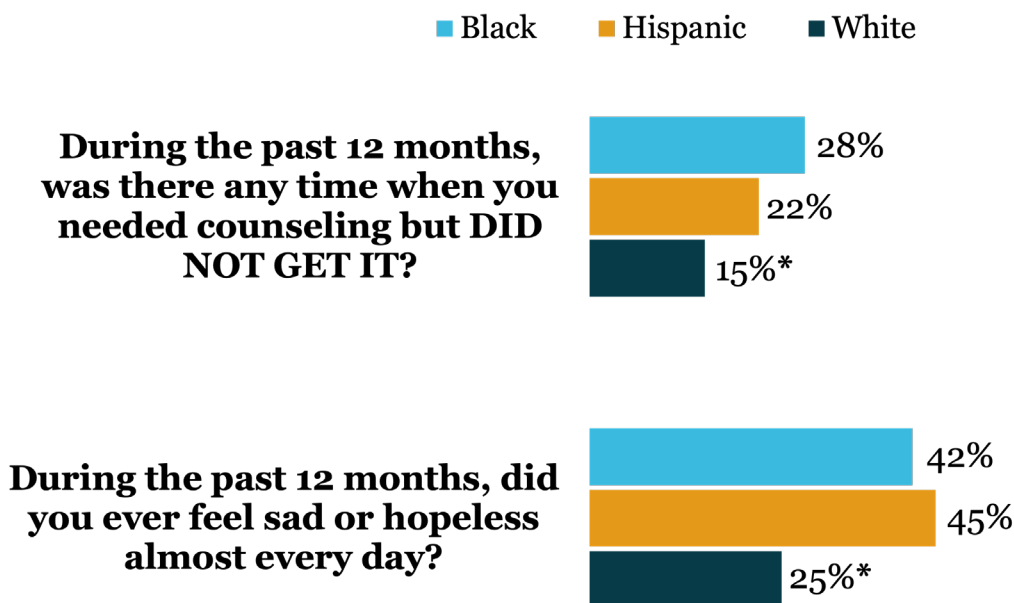
We have consistently asked youth about anxiety through a series of questions about how frequently they have worries or fears. Levels of anxious behavior were similar between the 2018-19 and 2021-22 surveys, indicating about 29% of students struggled with anxiety. In the 2024-25 survey, slightly more

Figure 23: On average, about one-third of New Orleans youth are struggling with mental health



All New Orleans youth do not experience mental health issues in the same way; there are important differences by race/ethnicity. Our results suggest that Black and Hispanic students reported more mental health needs and less mental health support than White students, as shown in Figure 24. We did not find similar differences for the other mental health measures discussed above. The fact that almost twice as many Black youth in New Orleans reported needing counseling but not getting it compared to White youth highlights the need to provide more counseling resources to Black youth. These gaps in depression and counseling are not explained by differences in school or neighborhood communities. In fact, youth report needing counseling but not getting it at similar rates across all Planning Districts in the city.

Figure 24: Black youth report more mental health needs and less mental health support than White youth



Note: Significant differences between Black students and Hispanic and White students are indicated by * ($p < .05$).

Social Media & Information

Youth in New Orleans have high Social Media usage and often turn to it for mental health support, especially among Black youth. They do not trust it as a source of Information.

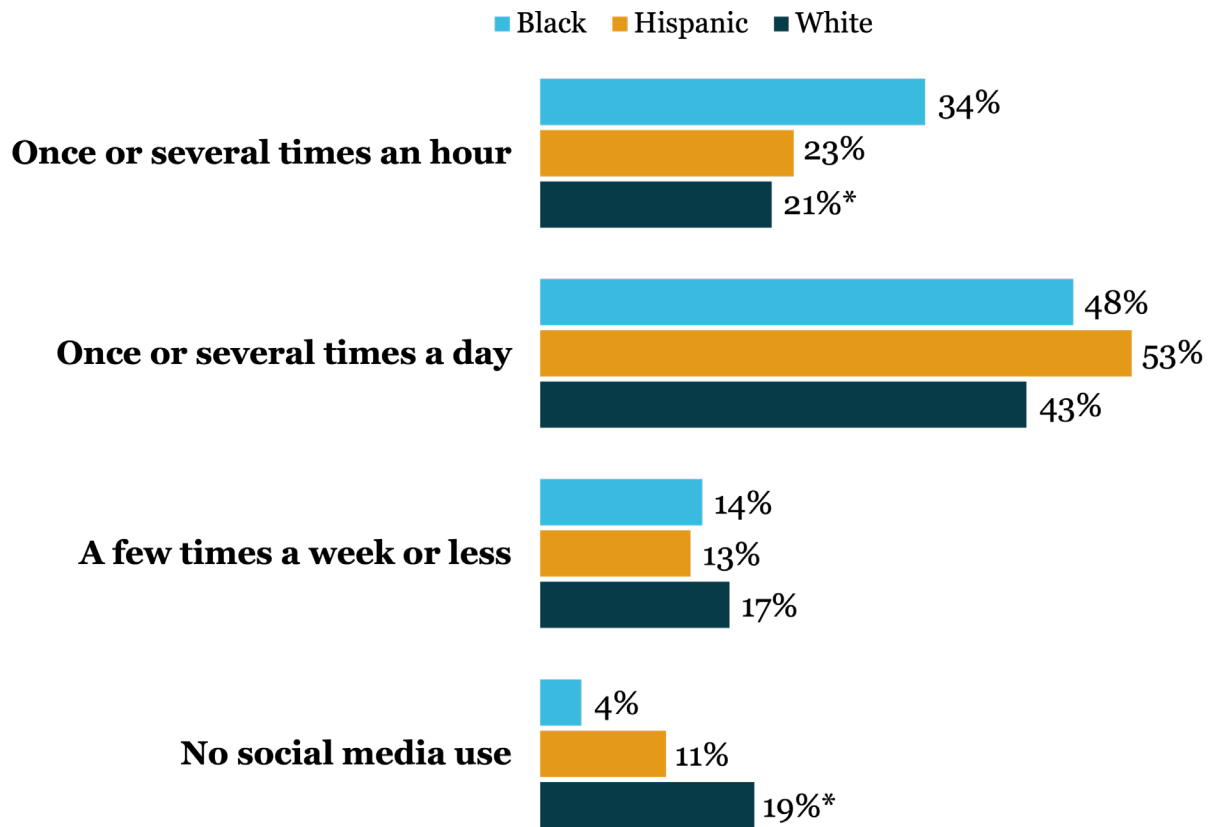


Gaining a better perspective of how youth find Information and use Social Media can assist government, school, and community leaders in reaching and educating New Orleans youth. The last new section we added to the survey asked students about how often they use social media and where they get their information from. Over 30% of New Orleans youth report using social media once an hour or more and an additional 40% claim to use social media several times

a day. These results align with students nationally, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control.

There are differences by race/ethnicity in social media usage, as shown in Figure 25. On average, Black youth report higher usage than both White and Hispanic youth. As we highlighted in the above section, social media can be a positive source of support for youth, as 25% claimed to receive support from social media in the month preceding the survey. Not surprisingly, given the reports of social media usage, Black youth find support through social media at twice the rate of White youth (28% and 14%, respectively).

Figure 25: Black youth report using Social Media more often than Hispanic and White youth in New Orleans



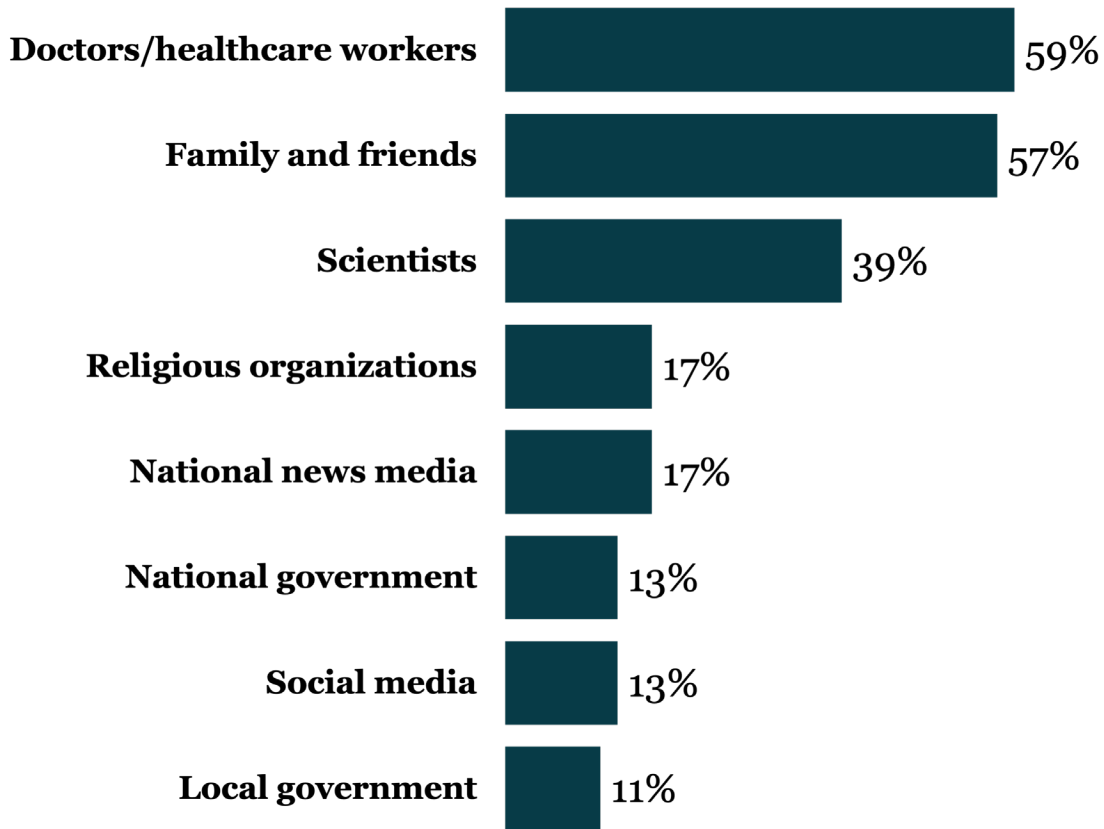
Note: Significant differences between Black students and Hispanic and White students are indicated by * ($p < .05$).

To get a better understanding of how youth use social media, we also asked about how much youth trust information from social media, compared to other sources of information. Only 13% of New Orleans youth reported to trust information from social media. In fact, social media was ranked second to last in the sources of information youth reported to trust (Figure 26). Compared with an international survey of youth 15-24 years old conducted by UNICEF, New Orleans youth trust social media and news organizations less, and family and friends more. Again, aligned with the patterns above, only 2% of White youth report trusting information from social media compared with 13% of Black youth and 20% of Hispanic youth. On the other hand, Black youth are much less likely to trust doctors and scientists than White and Hispanic youth. For example, only 30% of Black youth report trusting information from scientists “a lot”, compared with 72% of White youth and 58% of Hispanic youth. In all, New Orleans youth are high users of social media, as are youth nationally, but they use it more for support than for information.





Figure 26: New Orleans youth trust information from doctors and healthcare workers and their friends and family more than information from the media





CONCLUSION

This third New Orleans Citywide Youth Survey report provides a picture of New Orleans youth with high hopes for their futures, but less confidence in their abilities to reach their dreams. Struggles with mental health and limitations in support inside and outside of school may derail their pathways. Students believe they have the power to grow their abilities through effort and hard work and there have been improvements in their self-control. However, some do not believe their schools are preparing them for their future lives and many do not feel cared for by teachers in the classroom. The drive to start their own businesses, especially among Black youth, shows a dedication to pursuing their passions even if they need to chart their own course. Black, Hispanic, and White students report unequal experiences in their schools and communities, potentially due to differences by race/ethnicity and family income in their schools and neighborhoods. These results suggest a lot of strengths among the youth who will lead this city into the future and among schools and youth-serving organizations, but also highlight areas for improvement in the support we provide to them.

One critical area of concern is in mental health. While the youth of New Orleans display similar rates of depression and other mental health issues as youth across the country, they report not being able to get needed support. Most New Orleans youth say they will reach out to a friend for support when they are struggling, but about 20% struggle alone. Schools can be a source of counseling for students, but only if they feel their teachers understand them and can support their needs. Social media may be a source of support for some students, especially Black students who are twice as likely to turn to online communities when facing mental health issues. More work can be done to meet New Orleans youth where they are and

understand the barriers preventing them from receiving needed mental health counseling.

Another area with opportunities for growth is in preparing youth for their futures. That many youth dream to land in careers that would make them a lot of money points to the desire for a high quality of life and to avoid struggle. Yet youth seem to fear their own motivation and achievement may stop them from reaching their goals. Building confidence in their abilities to pursue and reach their dreams is critical. Except for in Healthcare, the industries New Orleans youth aspire to work in do not align with the labor market opportunities available in our city. This is troubling for a few reasons. First, it may draw potential future leaders to leave the city to pursue their dreams. It could also contribute to mental health issues later in life if they are not able to achieve their dreams and blame themselves. While asking youth to lower their expectations to align better with the labor market in New Orleans is not the answer, there may be opportunities to expose New Orleans youth to new careers in industries they were not aware of.

Our hope for the Citywide Youth Survey is for school and city leaders, community members, and others to use this information to guide the policies and programs they implement in the city. This report, and the attached Technical Appendix, provide many pathways forward but also leave many unanswered questions. More work can be done to integrate the voices of New Orleans youth into the systems that decide their opportunities. We hope this report provides future motivation and evidence of the need for leaders to do so.

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New Orleans Youth Alliance



YouthForce NOLA



New Schools for New Orleans



Early Childhood Policy Research Lab



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