



**Educational Outcomes and School Climate
Characteristics of the Louisiana GATOR
Scholarship Program**

Baseline Descriptive Evaluation

Prepared by:

StudyTrack Research & Analytics

An Education Data and Evaluation Unit of StudyTrack

Date of Publication:

March 2026

DISCLOSURE OF INSTITUTIONAL INTERESTS

Studyville LLC is an approved tutoring provider within the Louisiana GATOR Scholarship Program and currently serves a limited number of one participating student. Studyville maintains ownership in StudyTrack, the student data platform responsible for preparing this report. StudyTrack operates as a data analytics and evaluation entity independent of policy advocacy organizations, government agencies, or ESA platform vendors. StudyTrack does not engage in legislative lobbying related to ESA expansion or contraction. Its role in this evaluation is limited to descriptive analysis of voluntarily provided data.

StudyTrack's Research & Analytics unit operates separately from affiliated tutoring service providers and product development teams. Studyville's tutoring operations were not subjects of comparative analysis within this report.

All findings reflect aggregated data provided voluntarily by participating institutions and were analyzed using predefined descriptive methods. This report presents descriptive baseline observations and does not assert causal impact.

CLARIFICATION ON SCOPE OF FINDINGS

This report presents a descriptive baseline analysis of participating schools and families during the defined reporting period. It does not attempt to measure causal program impact, nor does it represent statewide incidence estimates.

Observed findings reflect aggregated institutional reporting and parent feedback from participating institutions and families. These data provide directional insight into school climate characteristics, including reported disciplinary incidents and parent-perceived safety conditions.

Where referenced in public discussion, these findings should be understood as descriptive indicators within the participating sample and not as definitive comparative outcomes across all sectors.

INTRODUCTION

Louisiana has long operated at the intersection of educational urgency and reform. With persistent challenges in statewide academic performance, policymakers have pursued structural changes intended to expand educational opportunity for students and families. The GATOR (Giving All True Opportunity for Results) Scholarship Program represents one such policy initiative. Until now, however, no independent, comprehensive baseline evaluation of its outcomes and fiscal structure has been conducted.

This report was developed to address a straightforward but consequential question: What does the currently available data indicate about the GATOR program's outcomes and public allocation framework?

StudyTrack was engaged to conduct this research not as a government agency, not as the administrator of the ESA platform, and not as an advocacy organization for or against school choice policy. StudyTrack serves in this context as an independent, non-partisan research and analytics partner whose institutional focus is student outcomes and accountability infrastructure. That structural independence defines the scope, limitations, and analytic posture of this evaluation.

What makes this effort historically significant is not just what was studied, but that it was studied at all. In the absence of mandated statewide ESA reporting requirements, this evaluation was conducted through voluntary participation by schools and families. As a

result, findings reflect participating institutions and respondents and may not represent the full GATOR population. These constraints are acknowledged throughout the report. The purpose of this study is not to claim universal coverage, but to establish a transparent descriptive baseline from the data currently available.

The evaluation examines the GATOR program across five domains: Academic Outcomes, Safety and School Environment, Academic Opportunity, Campus Life, and Success Factors. Together, these pillars provide a multidimensional descriptive picture of reported conditions among participating schools and families.

Within the reporting sample, participating schools indicate graduation and college enrollment rates above statewide public benchmarks, lower reported disciplinary incidents, smaller student-teacher ratios, and high levels of parent satisfaction. At the fiscal level, the average GATOR ESA award of \$7,220 represents 75.5% of the \$9,568 per-student allocation provided under Louisiana's Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) formula. This creates a \$2,348 allocation differential per participating student under current funding structures. Whether allocation differences translate into realized operational savings depends on marginal cost dynamics, fixed cost persistence, local revenue structures, and district-level fiscal elasticity—factors beyond the scope of this baseline analysis.

This report does not establish causation, measure student-level growth trajectories, or calculate definitive return on investment. Instead, it presents structured descriptive

evidence and identifies the data infrastructure required for more rigorous longitudinal and fiscal modeling in future phases.

The central question, therefore, is not whether Louisiana can afford to evaluate the GATOR program. It is whether Louisiana will choose to evaluate it with sufficient rigor, transparency, and independence to inform long-term policy decisions.

This study represents an initial step. A comprehensive assessment will require broader participation, standardized reporting definitions, longitudinal student tracking, and independent verification mechanisms. With such infrastructure in place, policymakers will be positioned to assess outcomes, fiscal impact, and program scale using evidence rather than assumption.

What follows is the baseline evidence collected to date and a framework for strengthening accountability architecture in the years ahead.

ABSTRACT

This five-pillar research report evaluates the Louisiana GATOR Scholarship Program, Louisiana's ESA program, through a multi-source analysis of academic outcomes, school safety, academic opportunity, campus life, school-level success factors, and cost effectiveness. Using institutional data from 190 surveyed private schools, student records for 1,300 enrolled students, and parent survey responses from 105 families, the report examines both outcomes and the conditions shaping student learning and development. Across all pillars, the evidence suggests a consistent pattern: GATOR-participating schools appear to provide educational environments that are lower-cost to the state, highly valued by participating families, and associated with strong academics, safety, and community indicators relative to Louisiana public school benchmarks.

Pillar I (Academic Outcomes) finds that reporting schools demonstrate strong academic indicators relative to Louisiana public benchmarks, including a 97.5% graduation rate, 88.1% college enrollment, and an average ACT score of 21, alongside smaller student-teacher ratios and class sizes that support individualized instruction (Surveyed Private Schools, 2026). Pillar II (Safety and School Environment) concludes that GATOR's safety advantages are primarily school-level rather than geographic: participating schools operate across Louisiana's full crime spectrum while demonstrating substantially lower bullying and suspension rates and faster emergency response access, with parent data reinforcing safety and social-emotional improvements.

ABSTRACT

Pillar III (Academic Opportunities) finds that academic opportunity expands through access to advanced coursework and counseling capacity, smaller classes, and robust accountability practices; students report high home technology access and connectivity, and participating schools report serving diverse learners, including students with disabilities and ELL participation. Pillar IV (Campus Life) documents campus life as a meaningful contributor to perceived program value, including extracurricular opportunities, structured parent involvement pathways, values alignment, and high satisfaction, framing school choice not merely as access to instruction, but access to supportive communities in which students can thrive. Pillar V (Success Factors) identifies success conditions associated with positive outcomes: low truancy, favorable student-teacher ratios, strong teacher retention, high parental involvement, and low-incident peer environments, while noting the constraints created by incomplete and uneven reporting across some student-level fields and the limited parent survey response share relative to the full enrolled population.

The report's cost comparison finds that GATOR awards average \$7,220 per student and equal to 75.5% of Louisiana's \$9,568 MFP allocation, a \$2,348 per-student difference in state allocation. It contextualizes this against public total expenditure figures in GATOR parishes and provides enrollment-based fiscal projections, while emphasizing that these estimates reflect allocation differences, not verified operational savings, and that marginal cost realities and local revenue dynamics require further study.

ABSTRACT

In synthesis, the report concludes that participating families report substantial satisfaction and improvement, participating schools demonstrate favorable multi-domain indicators, and the program operates at lower public allocation levels under current formulas, while also acknowledging analytical limits that prevent causal claims and necessitate stronger statewide data infrastructure, baseline measurement, and longitudinal tracking before definitive ROI conclusions or large-scale expansion decisions.

Appendix A provides de-identified, qualitative focus group findings to add implementation context to the quantitative results; these insights are explicitly non-representative and intended as illustrative evidence rather than statewide estimates.

Keywords: Louisiana GATOR Scholarship Program, ESA, Academic Outcomes, School Safety, Academic Opportunities, Campus Life, Fiscal Analysis, Education



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PILLAR I - ACADEMIC OUTCOMES	1
1.1 Purpose of Academic Outcome Analysis	1
1.2 Reported Graduation and Postsecondary Indicators	1
1.2.2 Instructional Environment Advantages	3
1.2.3 Resource and Quality Indicators	4
1.3 Strong Student Performance and Engagement	4
1.3.1 Student Demographics and Participation Profile	4
1.3.2 Academic Performance and Retention	5
1.3.3 Performance and Engagement Metrics	5
1.4 Academic Readiness and Parent-Reported Academic Experience	6
1.4.1 Advanced Academic Access	6
1.4.2 Parent-Reported Academic Progress	6
1.4.3 Reported Academic Baseline Indicators	7
1.4.4 Interpretation Boundaries for Parent Academic Reporting	7
1.5 Pillar I Synthesis and Key Takeaways	8
1.5.1 Comparative Analysis: GATOR ESA vs. Public Schools	8
1.5.2 Key Takeaways	9
PILLAR II - SAFETY AND SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT	11
2.1 Overview and Study Scope	11
2.1.1 School Climate and Reported Disciplinary Incidents	11
2.1.2 Study Coverage	12
2.1.3 Key Observations from Safety Analysis	12
2.1.4 The Safety Story: Choice Over Geography	14
2.2 GATOR Schools Operate Across Louisiana's Full Crime Spectrum	14
2.2.1 Statewide Geographic Distribution	14
2.2.2 Crime-Zone Distribution of LA GATOR Cities:	14
2.2.3 Critical Insight: ESA is Not Geographic Escape	15
2.3 Reported School Climate Indicators: Participating Sample	15
2.3.1 Comparative Safety Sample and Scope	15
2.3.2 Safety Metric Comparison (Public vs. Private)	16
2.3.3 Key Insights from Safety Comparison	16
2.4 Safety Improvements Through School Choice	17

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2.4.1 Magnitude of Percentage-Point Differences	17
2.4.2 Real-World Impact Translation	18
2.4.3 Safety Advantage Independent of Geographic Relocation	18
2.5 Faster Emergency Response Access at Private Schools	18
2.5.1 Emergency Response Analysis Overview	19
2.5.2 Why This Matters	20
2.5.3 Factors Contributing to Advantage	20
2.6 Parent-Reported Conduct and Discipline	20
2.6.1 Overview	21
2.6.2 Conduct Improvements	21
2.6.3 Disciplinary Incidents and Suspensions	22
2.6.4 Validation of Institutional Safety Findings	23
2.6.5 Data Source Convergence	24
2.6.6 Observations from Parent-Reported Data	24
2.7 Conclusion and Key Takeaways	25
2.7.1 Summary of Observed School Climate Indicators	25
2.7.2 Key Takeaways	26
PILLAR III - ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES	28
3.1 Overview and Analytical Scope	28
3.2 Access to Advanced Coursework and College Preparation	28
3.2.1 Advanced Coursework Availability	28
3.2.2 Public School Context and Course Access Restraints	29
3.2.3 College and Career Counseling Capacity	29
3.2.4 Advanced Course Access:	31
3.3 Small Class Sizes Enable Individualized Instruction	31
3.3.1 Class Size Comparison and Public Baseline	31
3.3.2 Why Smaller Classes Matter Instructionally	32
3.3.3 Parent Engagement as a Complement to Small-Class Instruction	33
3.3.4 Class Size Comparison:	33
3.4 Technology Access and Learning Resources	33
3.4.1 Household Technology and Internet Access	33
3.4.2 Limits of Current Measurement (Usage vs. Access)	34
3.4.3 Parent-School Communication and Support Infrastructure	34
3.4.4 Technology and Support Infrastructure in LA GATOR Recipient Homes	35

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3.5 Serving Diverse Learners and Special Populations	35
3.5.1 Student Learning Profiles and Population Diversity	35
3.5.2 Variation in Special Education Service Models	36
3.5.3 School Fit, Behavioral Outcomes, and Student Support	36
3.6 Quality Assurance Through Assessment and Accountability	37
3.6.1 Standardized Testing Practices	37
3.6.2 Accreditation and External Review	38
3.6.3 Accountability Through Parent Decision-Making	38
3.7 The Parent Perspective: Measurable Academic Growth	39
3.7.1 Parent-Reported Academic Improvement	39
3.7.2 Academic and Social-Emotional Growth Alignment	39
3.7.3 Satisfaction and Perceived Opportunity Gains	40
3.8 Interpreting Teacher Certification and Qualification Data	40
3.8.1 Certification and Advanced Degree Reporting	40
3.8.2 Methodological Cautions and Interpretation Limits	41
3.8.3 Outcome-Based Framing and Alternative Explanations	41
3.8.4 Teacher Retention and School Environment	42
3.9 Policy Implications: Expanding Opportunity Through Choice	42
3.9.1 Core Policy Finding	42
3.9.2 Comparative Opportunity and School Variation	43
3.9.3 Cost-Effectiveness and Fiscal Context	43
3.9.4 Data Gaps and Future Evaluation Priorities	44
3.10 Conclusion	45
3.10.1 Academic Opportunity as Total Learning Environment	45
3.10.2 Summary of Observable Opportunity Advantages	45
3.10.3 Program Evaluation Context and Legislative Decision Point	46
PILLAR IV - CAMPUS LIFE	47
4.1 Overview and Analytical Scope	47
4.1.1 Definition of Campus Life & Community	47
4.1.2 Data Sources and Limits	47
4.2 Extracurriculars, Sports, and Clubs	49
4.2.1 Participation Rates and Change from Prior Schooling	49
4.2.2 Program Availability vs. Program Access	50
4.2.3 School-Reported Program Offerings and Variation	51

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4.2.4 Parent-Reported Participation and Involvement Growth	51
4.2.5 Extracurricular Program Data	53
4.3 Parent Involvement and Parent Organizations	54
4.3.1 Parent Organization Infrastructure	54
4.3.2 Parent Perspectives on Community and Connection	54
4.3.3 Private School Parent Involvement Model	55
4.3.4 Research Context on Parent Engagement	56
4.3.5 Parent Involvement Indicators	57
4.4 School Culture, Mission, and Values Alignment	57
4.4.1 School Identity Landscape	57
4.4.2 Why Families Choose These Communities	57
4.4.3 Values Alignment as a Campus Culture Mechanism	58
4.4.4 Parent-Reported Social-Emotional Progress	58
4.5 Religious Identity and Values Alignment Shape School Culture	60
4.5.1 Religious Affiliation Distribution Across GATOR Schools	60
4.5.2 Family Motivation and Values-Based School Selection	60
4.5.3 Values Alignment and Satisfaction Outcomes	61
4.5.4 School Culture Beyond Formal Religious Instruction	62
4.5.5 Choice, Pluralism, and Family Autonomy	63
4.5.6 Religious Identity and Values	63
4.6 Program Commitment and Family Retention Indicators	63
4.6.1 National Research Context and Benchmarking	65
4.6.2 GATOR Satisfaction Distribution and Comparative Interpretation	66
4.6.3 Open-Ended Responses and Community Experience	68
4.6.4 Retention and Recommendation as Loyalty Indicators	69
4.7 The Parent Perspective: Community and Belonging	69
4.7.1 Qualitative Themes of Belonging and Relationship	69
4.7.2 Holistic Development and Structured Environment	70
4.7.3 Campus Life as a Mechanism for Outcomes Across Pillars	71
4.7.4 Academic Progress Perception Shift	71
4.8 Interpreting Variation in Campus Life Models	72
4.8.1 Families Value More Than Academics	72
4.8.2 Variation as Program Strength Rather Than Weakness	73
4.8.3 Interpreting Aggregate Statistics with Caution	74

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4.9 Conclusion	75
4.9.1 Campus Life as the Human Dimension	75
4.9.2 Public School Assignment and Community Fit Tensions	75
4.9.3 Choice as Community Self-Selection	76
4.9.4 Research Context: Small Schools, Belonging, and Non-Cognitive Gains	77
4.9.5 Campus Life as an Essential Component of Educational Quality	77
4.9.6 Summary of Observable Campus Life Strengths	78
4.9.7 Cross-Pillar Synthesis and Final Evaluation Finding	78
PILLAR V - SUCCESS FACTORS	80
5.1 Overview and Analytical Scope	80
5.1.1 Pillar Framing and Definition of Success Factors	80
5.1.2 Family Demographic Profile of Reporting Sample	82
5.1.3 Parent Engagement and School Connection	82
5.2 Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism	84
5.2.1 Why Truancy Matters for Academic Outcomes	84
5.2.2 School-Reported Truancy and Attendance	84
5.2.3 Student-Level Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism	85
5.2.4 Public Benchmark Context and Interpretation	86
5.3 Student-Teacher Ratios in Reporting Schools	87
5.3.1 Instructional Group Size	87
5.3.2 School-Reported Ratios and Class Sizes	88
5.3.3 Public School Funding Thresholds and Comparison	89
5.3.4 Student-Teacher Ratio Data	90
5.4 Teacher Retention Rates Are High Among Reporting Schools	91
5.4.1 The Significance of Teacher Retention	91
5.4.2 School-Reported Retention Rates	92
5.4.3 Certification and Staffing Variation	92
5.5 Parent-School Communication and Engagement	93
5.5.1 Parent Involvement as a Success Factor	93
5.5.2 Conference Attendance and At-Home Support	93
5.5.3 School-Level Parent Organizations and Community Formation	95
5.5.4 Benchmark Context and Interpretation	96
5.6 Peer Environment and Student Engagement Patterns	97
5.6.1 Peer Effects as a Structural Variable	97

TABLE OF CONTENTS

5.6.2 Behavioral Incidence as Peer Climate	98
5.6.3 Parent-Reported Conduct and Behavioral Change	98
5.6.4 Extracurricular Participation as a Peer Environment Indicator	98
5.6.5 Student Composition and ESA Share Context	99
5.6.6 Peer Environment Data	99
5.7 Diploma Strength and Post-Secondary Credential Context	100
5.7.1 Louisiana Strength of Diploma Framework	100
5.7.2 GATOR Participating Non-Public School Context	101
5.7.3 Comparative Interpretation	103
5.7.4 Requirements for an Aligned Comparison	104
5.8 Data Limitations	105
5.8.1 Coverage and Parsing Limitations	105
5.8.2 Parent Survey Response Limitations	105
5.8.3 Student Records Completeness Limitation	105
5.9 Cross-Finding Synthesis and Summary	106
5.9.1 Summary of Conditions Associated with Positive Outcomes	106
COST COMPARISON OF LA GATOR AND PUBLIC EDUCATION	108
6.1 Overview and Analytical Scope	108
6.1.1 Fiscal Question and Outcome Context	108
6.1.2 Data Sources and Study Coverage	109
6.2 Primary Fiscal Framework: Allocation Comparison	109
6.2.1 Why Allocation is the Primary Policy Comparison	109
6.2.2 Louisiana MFP Allocation vs. GATOR ESA Allocation	110
6.2.3 Parent-Reported ESA Award vs. Official Program Data	110
6.2.4 Fiscal Impact Using Allocation Comparison	111
6.2.5 Projected Expansion Scenarios:	111
6.3 Supporting Context: Expenditure Comparison and Financial Models	112
6.3.1 Expenditure as a Distinct Fiscal Question	112
6.3.2 Different Financial Models in Public vs. Private Schools	113
6.3.3 Interpreting Expenditure Comparisons Responsibly	114
6.4 Methodological Caveat: Marginal Cost vs. Average Cost	115
6.4.1 Fixed Costs and Enrollment Elasticity	115
6.4.2 Conditions Under Which Marginal Savings Could Rise	116
6.4.3 Implications for Interpreting Fiscal Projections	116

TABLE OF CONTENTS

6.5 Primary Framework and Supporting Context	116
6.5.1 Allocation-Based Fiscal Conclusion	116
6.5.2 Cross-Pillar Outcome Context for Cost Evaluation	118
6.5.3 Legislative Decision Framing	118
6.6 Study Coverage and Headline Findings	118
6.6.1 Study Coverage	118
6.6.2 Key Findings Summary	119
6.7 Cost-Effectiveness Narrative and Comparative Metrics	119
6.7.1 The Cost-Effectiveness Story	119
6.7.2 Summary Comparison Table (Cost and Outcomes)	120
6.7.3 Guiding Evaluation Questions	121
6.8 Cost Comparison Analysis	122
6.8.1 GATOR ESA Allocation Compared to Public School MFP Allocation	122
6.8.2 Fiscal Implications and Allocation Impact	123
6.8.3 Where GATOR Students Come From: Actual Prior School Costs	124
6.8.4 Current Private School Costs	125
6.8.5 Fiscal Impact to Louisiana Taxpayers	126
6.8.6 Family Financial Contributions and Access Equity	127
6.9 Limitations and Counterarguments	129
6.9.1 Marginal Cost vs. Average Cost: The Fixed Cost Challenge	129
6.9.2 Local Tax Revenue Impact	130
6.9.3 Selection Effects and Causality	131
6.9.4 Areas Requiring Further Analysis	132
6.10 Scope and Limitations of This Analysis	134
6.10.1 What This Analysis Establishes	134
6.10.2 What This Analysis Cannot Determine	134
6.10.3 Future Research Priorities for Comprehensive Assessment	135
SYNTHESIS: KEY FINDINGS ACROSS FIVE PILLARS	136
7.1 Overview and Analytical Scope	136
7.1.1 Synthesis Purpose and Central Policy Question	136
7.2 Five-Pillar Evidence Base	136
7.2.1 Academic Outcomes	136
7.2.2 Safety and Environment	137
7.2.3 Academic Opportunities	137

TABLE OF CONTENTS

7.2.4 Campus Life	138
7.2.5 Success Factors	138
7.3 The Cost-Value Relationship	139
7.3.1 Allocation-Based Cost Comparison	139
7.3.2 Enrollment Scenarios and Fiscal Projections	139
7.3.3 Expenditure Context and Different Financial Models	139
7.3.4 Cost-Value Interpretation with Analytical Cautions	140
7.4 What the Evidence Establishes	140
7.4.1 Conclusion One: Family Satisfaction and Improvement	140
7.4.2 Conclusion Two: Measurable Outcomes Across Domains	141
7.4.3 Conclusion Three: Lower Public Allocation Requirement	141
7.4.4 Conclusion Four: Analytical Limits on Causal Interpretation	141
7.5 What the Evidence Cannot Establish	142
7.6 Implications for Louisiana Policymakers	143
7.6.1 Policy Decision Framing	143
7.6.2 Perspective One: Outcomes Perspective	143
7.6.3 Perspective Two: Fiscal Responsibility Perspective	144
7.6.4 Perspective Three: Evidence-Building Perspective	144
7.6.5 Balancing Frameworks and Legislative Judgment	145
7.7 Research Priorities	145
7.8 Conclusion	146
7.8.1 Synthesis of Outcomes, Cost, and Limitations	146
7.8.2 Legislative Decision Context	146
7.8.3 Final Evidence-Based Assessment	147
CONCLUSION	148
8.1 Baseline Findings, Future Measurement, and the Path Forward	148
8.1.1 Baseline Evaluation Purpose and Scope	148
8.1.2 What the Current Evidence Suggests	148
8.1.3 What the Current Structure Cannot Yet Establish	149
8.1.4 Why Longitudinal Independent Evaluation is Necessary	149
8.2 The Case for Required Independent Data Collection	149
8.2.1 Accountability as a Policy Concern	149
8.2.2 Recommended Independent Data Collection Requirements	150
8.2.3 Why Independent Reporting Would Strengthen the Program	150

TABLE OF CONTENTS

8.3 Addressing Structural Concerns About Education Finance	151
8.3.1 Framing the Finance Debate	151
8.3.2 GATOR Does Not Currently Restructure the MFP	151
8.3.3 Scarcity of Resources Is a Valid Policy Question, Not a Rebuttal of Outcomes	152
8.3.4 Serving a Subset of Students Is Not Equivalent to Structural Abandonment	152
8.3.5 The “Money Follows the Child” Question Requires Separate Debate	152
8.4 Comparative Investment Considerations	153
8.4.1 Alternative Education Investments and False Tradeoffs	153
8.4.2 The Relevant Fiscal Question	153
8.5 Accountability as the Unifying Principle	154
8.5.1 Why Accountability is the Strongest Path Forward	154
8.5.2 If GATOR Continues: Recommended Accountability Measures	154
8.6 Final Assessment	155
8.6.1 Summary of Baseline Findings	155
8.6.2 What These Findings Do and Do Not Establish	155
8.6.3 The Next Phase: Rigorous Movement	155
REFERENCES	158
APPENDIX A. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FROM LA GATOR PARENT FOCUS GROUPS	160
A.1 Purpose, Scope, and Intended Use	160
A.1.1 Purpose and Role of the Appendix	160
A.1.2 De-Identification and Confidentiality Notice	160
A.2 Data Sources and Methodological Note	160
A.2.1 Source Materials Used	160
A.2.2 Participant Composition and Parent Group Types	161
A.3 Limitations	161
A.3.1 Sample and Selection Limitations	161
A.3.2 Intended Interpretive Use Alongside Qualitative Evidence	162
A.4 Summary of Key Qualitative Findings	162
A.4.1 Cross-Session Summary Themes	162
A.4.2 Integrated Interpretive Summary	162
A.5 Detailed Findings	163
A.5.1 Two Primary Use Cases for LA GATOR Participation	163
A.5.1.1 Transition into Private School (Switch Families)	163
A.5.1.2 Sustaining Private School Enrollment (Continuity Families)	163

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A.5.2 Financial Relief as the Most Consistent Cross-Session Benefit	163
A.5.3 School Environment, Safety, and Class Size as Central Drivers of School Choice	164
A.5.4 Parent-Reported Improvements in Student Confidence and Social-Emotional Well-Being	165
A.5.5 Academic Feedback Was Generally Positive, with Useful Nuance	165
A.5.6 School Communication and Responsiveness as High-Value Differentiators	166
A.5.7 Program Usability Was Generally Positive, with Targeted Implementation Improvements	166
A.5.8 Parent “Choice” Was Often Shaped by Practical Constraints	167
A.6 Cross-Cutting Observations for Policymakers	168
A.6.1 LA GATOR as Both an Education Program and Household-Stability Support	168
A.6.2 Parent Emphasis on School Fit, Not Only School Access	168
A.6.3 Administrative and Procedural Improvement Priorities	168
A.7 Study Scope and Limitations	169
A.8 Conclusion	169



LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1.1 LA GATOR Population by Individual School Grade and Aggregate School Level.....	3
Figure 2.1 Private School Safety Advantages Over Public Schools.....	17
Figure 2.2 Private Response Time Advantage.....	19
Figure 2.3 Parent-Reported Safety Outcomes: GATOR vs. Louisiana Public Schools.....	23
Figure 3.1 Academic Opportunity Ecosystem.....	30
Figure 3.2 Smaller Classes Enable Individualized Attention: GATOR Private Schools vs. Louisiana Public Schools.....	32
Figure 4.1 Campus Life Ecosystem: How GATOR Schools Build Community.....	49
Figure 4.2 Student Engagement Distribution: GATOR vs. Public Schools.....	53
Figure 4.3 Parent-Reported Progress Since GATOR Enrollment Academic and Social-Emotional Outcomes.....	59
Figure 4.4 School Identity & Family Satisfaction.....	62
Figure 4.5 Parent Satisfaction Transformation Public School vs. Private School.....	65
Figure 4.6 Parent Satisfaction Distribution: GATOR vs. National Averages.....	67
Figure 4.7 Academic Progress Distribution: Before and After GATOR.....	72
Figure 5.1 Success Factors – GATOR Schools vs. Louisiana Public Schools.....	81
Figure 5.2 Peer Environment & Attendance: Distribution Comparison.....	85
Figure 5.3 Instructional Conditions: Teacher Retention & Class Size.....	89
Figure 5.4 Parental Involvement: GATOR Families vs. National Low-Income Averages.....	95
Figure 6.1 Current Analyzed Enrollment vs. Total Program Enrollment.....	111

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 6.2 Projected Expansion Enrollment Scenario..... 111

Table 1.1 GATOR ESA & LA Public School Comparison..... 8

Table 2.1 Safety Metric Comparison of Public and Private Schools..... 16

Table 6.1 Comparison of Louisiana Public Schools and GATOR Schools..... 120

Table 6.2 GATOR ESA Voucher Compared to LA MFP Allocation & LA Total
Expenditure..... 122

Table 6.3 Comparison of Cost and Savings (Current vs. Expansion)..... 127

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ACRONYMS

GATOR Giving All True Opportunity for Results

ESA Education Savings Account

ROI Return on Investment

MFP Minimum Foundation Program

ACT ACT test/score

ELL English Language Learner(s)

LDOE Louisiana Department of Education

AP / IB / DE Advanced Placement / International Baccalaureate / Dual

Enrollment

LEAP Louisiana State Assessment Referenced in Student Performance

Reporting

ELA English Language Arts

GPA Grade Point Average

SNAP Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

TANF Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

LA Louisiana

SRO School Resource Officer

EMS Emergency Medical Services

FBI Federal Bureau of Investigation

NFPA National Fire Protection Association

FTE Full-Time Equivalent

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ACRONYMS

IOWA / STAR / NWEA / Terra Nova Named Assessment Instruments Used by Reporting Schools

SACS Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

Cognia / AdvancED Accrediting Organizations

PK3-12 Pre-Kindergarten 3 through Grade 12

PTO Parent-Teacher Organization

PTA Parent-Teacher Association

NCES National Center for Education Statistics

STAR Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio

K-8 Kindergarten through Grade 8

PTA Parent-Teacher Association

NCES National Center for Education Statistics

TOPS Taylor Opportunity Program for Students

NCAA National Collegiate Athletic Association

LA R.S. Louisiana Revised Statutes

IDEA Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

FAQ Frequently Asked Question(s)

PILLAR I - ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

1.1 Purpose of Academic Outcome Analysis

The purpose of Pillar I is to examine reported academic outcomes among participating GATOR schools and families. This section evaluates graduation rates, college enrollment, standardized test performance, attendance indicators, and related academic benchmarks within the reporting sample.

The analysis is descriptive. It does not attempt to establish causal attribution between GATOR participation and observed outcomes. Rather, it presents reported indicators to provide baseline visibility into academic performance among participating institutions.

1.2 Reported Graduation and Postsecondary Indicators

Among reporting GATOR high schools:

- Graduation rate: 97.5%
- College enrollment rate: 88.1%
- Average ACT composite score: 21

The mean graduation rate across reporting schools reaches 97.5%, with ten schools achieving perfect 100% graduation rates. This is 17.5 percentage points higher than the cited Louisiana public school average of approximately 80%.

College enrollment data reveals similarly strong outcomes. Eight schools reported rates averaging 88.1%, with individual institutions ranging from 69% to 99%. This exceeds Louisiana's public school college enrollment rate of approximately 62% by 26 percentage points, a substantial advantage suggesting GATOR participants experience greater college access (Louisiana Board of Regents, 2024).

These indicators are presented descriptively and reflect data voluntarily provided by participating schools.

For contextual comparison, Louisiana's statewide public school graduation rate is approximately 80%, and statewide college enrollment is approximately 62%. The Louisiana average ACT composite score is 18.2.

While reporting schools demonstrate graduation and college enrollment rates that exceed published Louisiana public school averages, these comparisons provide context but should not be interpreted as direct equivalency comparisons. Differences in student demographics, reporting frameworks, and selection effects may influence outcomes.

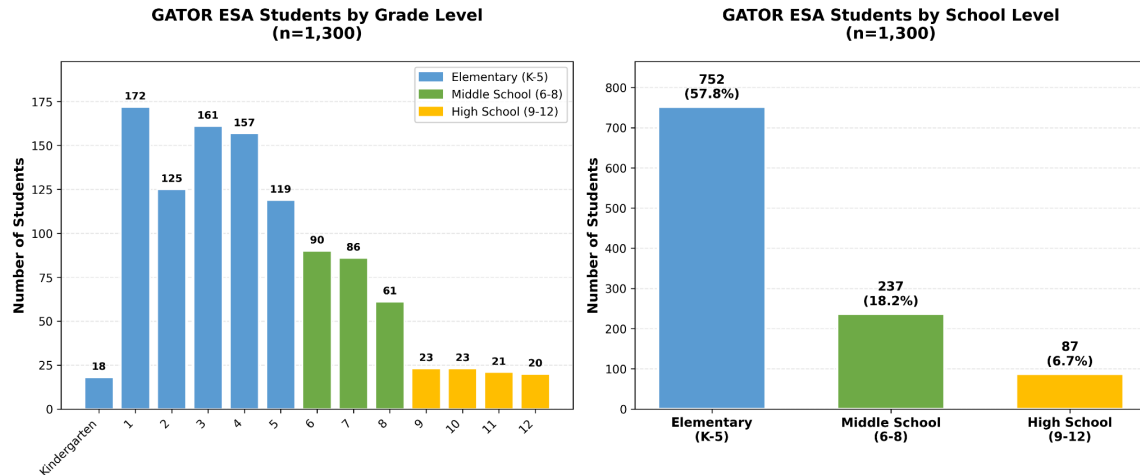


Figure 1.1 LA GATOR Population by Individual School Grade and Aggregate School Level
 Source: Surveyed Private Schools (2026). College enrollment data are institutionally reported and not independently verified through statewide postsecondary tracking systems.

Key Academic Performance Indicators:

- Graduation rate: 97.5% (vs. ~80% public)
- College enrollment: 88.1% (vs. ~62% public)
- Average ACT: 21 (vs. 18.2 state average)
- Attendance rate: 94.3% average
- Teacher retention: 88.7% (vs. ~84% public)

1.2.2 Instructional Environment Advantages

Beyond outcome metrics, participating schools demonstrate strong instructional environments. Student-teacher ratios average 12.5:1 across 23 reporting schools, compared to Louisiana's public school average of approximately 18:1. This represents 30%

smaller ratios, suggesting students receive significantly more individualized attention.

Average class sizes mirror this advantage at 15.4 students, roughly 30% smaller than typical public school classes (Surveyed Private Schools, 2026).

1.2.3 Resource and Quality Indicators

- Student-teacher ratio: 12.5:1 (vs. 18:1 public)
- Average class size: 15.4 students (vs. 22 public)
- Advanced coursework: 223 AP/IB/DE courses across 5 schools
- Teacher certification: 74.9% average
- Teachers with advanced degrees: 26.4%

1.3 Strong Student Performance and Engagement

Individual student records provide detailed insights into GATOR participant characteristics and academic performance. The 1,300-student dataset spans multiple Louisiana parishes, with demographic composition broadly reflecting Louisiana's student population. The program serves predominantly elementary students (57.8% in grades K-5), with 54% identifying as Black or African American and 37% as White.

1.3.1 Student Demographics and Participation Profile

- 1,300 students across Louisiana parishes
- 56% actively using ESA scholarships as primary funding

- 26% receiving additional school financial aid beyond ESA
- Race/ethnicity: 54% Black, 37% White, 4% Hispanic, 3% multiracial
- Grade distribution: 64% elementary, 16% middle, 5% high school

1.3.2 Academic Performance and Retention

LEAP testing data were available for approximately one-third of students, reflecting variation in assessment practices across private institutions. Among tested students, performance indicates generally strong achievement, with median scores of 714 in ELA and 700 in mathematics. Grade point averages, available for 28% of students, show a median of 3.67, notably higher than public institutions on average.

Student retention data provides perhaps the clearest satisfaction indicator. Among responses, 80% indicate definite plans to continue using ESA scholarships, with only 8% planning to discontinue. This high retention rate, combined with 26% of families contributing supplemental funds beyond ESA allocations, suggests strong perceived value despite financial demands.

1.3.3 Performance and Engagement Metrics

- LEAP median scores: 714 ELA, 700 Math
- Median GPA: 3.67
- Attendance rate: 94.3% median, 86% mean
- Chronic absenteeism: 6.3% (vs. 20.8% public)

- Student retention: 80% plan to continue
- Disciplinary incidents: 93% with zero incidents

1.4 Academic Readiness and Parent-Reported Academic Experience

1.4.1 Advanced Academic Access

Participating high schools report availability of Advanced Placement (AP) coursework across multiple institutions. While AP course availability does not equate to AP examination passage or Louisiana Strength of Diploma index calculations, the presence of advanced coursework indicates access to college-level academic pathways within the reporting sample.

ACT performance provides an additional readiness indicator, as ACT scores are used for postsecondary admissions and scholarship eligibility benchmarks within Louisiana.

Because readiness metrics are not reported using Louisiana's public accountability index formulas, graduation rates, college enrollment, ACT performance, and AP availability are presented descriptively rather than as weighted accountability scores.

1.4.2 Parent-Reported Academic Progress

Among 105 responding families, 67.6% report their child's academic performance as "much better" since receiving the GATOR scholarship, and 18.1% report performance as "better."

In total, 85.7% of families perceive academic improvement following enrollment in a

participating private school. Approximately 12.4% report performance as “about the same,” and very few families report decline.

These perceptions reflect voluntary survey responses and should be interpreted as complementary to institutional reporting rather than as independently verified performance measures.

1.4.3 Reported Academic Baseline Indicators

Survey responses include additional academic context:

- Median reported GPA: 3.67
- LEAP median scores (self-reported subset): 714 ELA, 700 Math

These figures are presented descriptively and reflect data voluntarily provided by responding families. No pre-enrollment matched comparison data is available to evaluate academic growth trajectories.

1.4.4 Interpretation Boundaries for Parent Academic Reporting

Parent-reported academic perceptions offer insight into family experience and observed progress. However:

- Survey participation was voluntary.
- Responses are self-reported.

- No matched baseline performance data is available.
- No longitudinal student-level growth tracking is included.

Accordingly, this section describes reported perceptions and readiness indicators but does not establish causal impact or measured academic growth.

1.5 Pillar I Synthesis and Key Takeaways

1.5.1 Comparative Analysis: GATOR ESA vs. Public Schools

Comparing GATOR ESA outcomes to Louisiana public school benchmarks reveals the program's relative performance across cost and academic metrics. These comparisons require cautious interpretation given selection effects and response bias, yet the available data permits meaningful analysis of program value.

Table 1.1 GATOR ESA & LA Public School Comparison

Metric	GATOR ESA	LA Public
Graduation Rate	97.5%	80%
College Enrollment	88.1%	62%
Average ACT	21	18.2
Student-Teacher Ratio	12.5:1	18:1
Chronic Absenteeism	6.3%	20%

The cost-outcome comparison presents a notable allocation differential alongside favorable reported outcome indicators within the participating sample. However, efficiency cannot be definitively assessed without longitudinal growth data, matched comparison groups, and verified marginal cost modeling at the district level.

1.5.2 Key Takeaways

The academic outcome indicators presented in this pillar provide descriptive insight into reported performance among participating GATOR schools within the voluntary reporting sample.

Participating high schools report:

- Graduation rates of 97.5%
- College enrollment rates of 88.1%
- An average ACT composite score of 21
- Documented availability of Advanced Placement coursework

These indicators, presented descriptively, reflect reported academic readiness and postsecondary transition patterns within the reporting subset.

Parent-reported academic perceptions align with institutional reporting, with 85.7% of responding families indicating that their child's academic performance has improved since enrollment. While survey responses are self-reported and voluntary, they provide additional context regarding family-perceived academic experience.

Several interpretive boundaries apply. Institutional reporting participation was voluntary. Student-level baseline data prior to enrollment were not available. No matched comparison group or longitudinal growth tracking was conducted. Accordingly, findings should be interpreted as descriptive baseline observations rather than causal impact estimates.

Taken together, the data presented in Pillar I suggest that participating schools report favorable academic outcome indicators within the current reporting framework.

Determining whether these outcomes reflect program effects, institutional characteristics, or selection dynamics will require broader participation, standardized reporting, and longitudinal student-level analysis in future evaluation phases.



PILLAR II - SAFETY AND SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

2.1 Overview and Study Scope

2.1.1 School Climate and Reported Disciplinary Incidents

Participating schools provided aggregated institutional reporting on disciplinary and bullying-related incidents during the defined evaluation period. Within the participating sample, reported bullying-related incidents represented approximately 0.3% of enrolled students, and suspension rates represented approximately 0.5%.

For contextual reference, publicly available Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) statewide reporting for the 2022–2023 academic year indicates reported bullying-related incidents of approximately 5.7% and suspension rates of approximately 9.6%.

Differences in reporting standards, documentation thresholds, academic year alignment, and accountability structures may influence comparability across sectors. Future evaluations should require harmonized disciplinary definitions and uniform reporting protocols across ESA and public sectors to ensure direct comparability. Accordingly, these figures are presented as contextual benchmarks rather than standardized equivalency comparisons.

These findings reflect descriptive observations within the participating sample and highlight the importance of future evaluations using unified definitions and required cross-sector reporting.

2.1.2 Study Coverage

- **All 190 participating private schools** analyzed across Louisiana's geographic and demographic diversity
- Analysis covers **66 unique Louisiana cities** spanning urban, suburban, and rural communities
- Statewide reach across **41 parishes and 101 zip codes** (64% of Louisiana parishes)
- Public school comparison includes 1,379 schools across Louisiana for contextual baseline
- Geographic reach extends from Louisiana's largest cities (New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Shreveport) to small rural towns (Coushatta, Winnsboro, Farmerville)

2.1.3 Key Observations from Safety Analysis

- Participating schools are distributed across diverse community contexts, with 38.4% located in municipalities classified as Very High crime zones.

- Aggregated institutional reporting from 27 surveyed schools (representing approximately 1,300 participating students across 10 parishes) reported bullying-related incidents of 0.3%, suspension rates of 0.5%, and truancy rates of 0.7% during the defined evaluation period.
- For contextual reference, publicly available Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) statewide reporting for the 2022–2023 academic year indicates reported bullying-related incidents of 5.7%, suspension rates of 9.6%, attendance rates of 91.4%, and truancy rates of 8.3%.
- School Resource Officer (SRO) presence among participating schools was reported at approximately 50%, comparable to statewide public school reporting.
- Modeled emergency response analysis across all 190 participating schools indicated an average estimated response time of 6.81 minutes, compared to 9.08 minutes for public schools statewide, reflecting geographic proximity patterns across urban, suburban, and rural contexts.

These observations reflect descriptive findings within the participating sample and are presented alongside publicly available statewide data for contextual understanding. Differences in reporting standards, documentation thresholds, and academic year alignment may influence comparability across sectors.

2.1.4 The Safety Story: Choice Over Geography

Louisiana faces significant public safety challenges. The state ranks 5th nationally for both violent crime (520 per 100,000) and property crime (2,296 per 100,000). Louisiana has held the highest murder rate in the nation for 36 consecutive years (USAFacts, 2024).

These challenges affect entire communities. Both public and private schools operate within this context. **The GATOR program does not primarily relocate students to safer cities.**

Instead, it empowers families to choose schools based on values, culture, and educational environment regardless of the crime zone private schools reside in.

2.2 GATOR Schools Operate Across Louisiana's Full Crime Spectrum

2.2.1 Statewide Geographic Distribution

Private GATOR schools are not concentrated in safer cities. Comprehensive analysis of all 190 participating schools reveals statewide distribution across 41 parishes and 66 cities, with **38.4% operating in Very High crime zones**, Louisiana's most dangerous urban areas (FBI, 2024; NeighborhoodScout, 2024).

2.2.2 Crime-Zone Distribution of LA GATOR Cities:

- **Very High Crime:** Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Monroe, Shreveport, Alexandria (73 schools, 38.4%)
- **High Crime:** Lafayette, Lake Charles, Houma, Metairie, Kenner (42 schools, 22.1%)

- **Moderate Crime:** Slidell, Mandeville, Covington, Gonzales (69 schools, 36.3%)
- **Low Crime:** Winnsboro, Coushatta, Farmerville (6 schools, 3.2%)

2.2.3 Critical Insight: ESA is Not Geographic Escape

Over 60% of GATOR schools operate in High or Very High crime zones, demonstrating that private school access through ESA occurs within Louisiana's most challenging urban environments, not through geographic relocation to safer regions.

2.3 Reported School Climate Indicators: Participating Sample

2.3.1 Comparative Safety Sample and Scope

Private schools maintain exceptional safety cultures despite operating in high-crime cities. Of the 27 schools with reported safety data, representing 1,300 GATOR participants across 10 parishes, direct comparison with public schools reveals that families prioritize school-level safety factors such as discipline policies, culture, attendance management, and SRO presence over neighborhood crime statistics. **These 27 schools collectively reported 0.3% bullying incidents, 0.5% suspension rates, and 0.7% truancy rates, all significantly lower than Louisiana public school averages** (Surveyed Private Schools, 2026). Analysis of these schools demonstrates consistent safety advantages across varied geographic and demographic contexts.

2.3.2 Safety Metric Comparison (Public vs. Private)

Table 2.1 Safety Metric Comparison of Public and Private Schools. Source: Surveyed Private Schools (2026); Louisiana Department of Education, LSP Data (2023)

Safety Metric	Public Schools	Private Schools
Schools with SRO	61.6%	29.6% suspension
Average Bullying Incident Rate	5.7%	0.3%
Average Suspension Rate	9.6%	0.5%
Average Attendance Rate	91.4%	97.0%
Average Truancy Rate	8.3%	0.7%

These comparisons are presented for contextual understanding. Reporting definitions, disciplinary thresholds, and documentation requirements differ across sectors. Public schools operate under mandatory reporting statutes; non-public schools do not. As such, these figures reflect directional differences rather than standardized equivalency comparisons.

2.3.3 Key Insights from Safety Comparison

- Reported bullying rates were 0.3% among surveyed participating schools compared to 5.7% statewide public benchmarks.
- Reported suspension rates were 0.5% among surveyed participating schools compared to 9.6% statewide public benchmarks.

- **Attendance rates are 5.6 percentage points higher** in private schools (97.0% vs. 91.4%)
- SRO presence indicates security is prioritized equally
- **Truancy rates are 92% lower** in private schools (0.7% vs. 8.3%), with 60.9% of schools reporting zero truancy incidents

2.4 Safety Improvements Through School Choice

2.4.1 Magnitude of Percentage-Point Differences

Observed differences in reported disciplinary rates between surveyed participating schools and statewide public benchmarks reflect meaningful variation in reported school climate indicators.

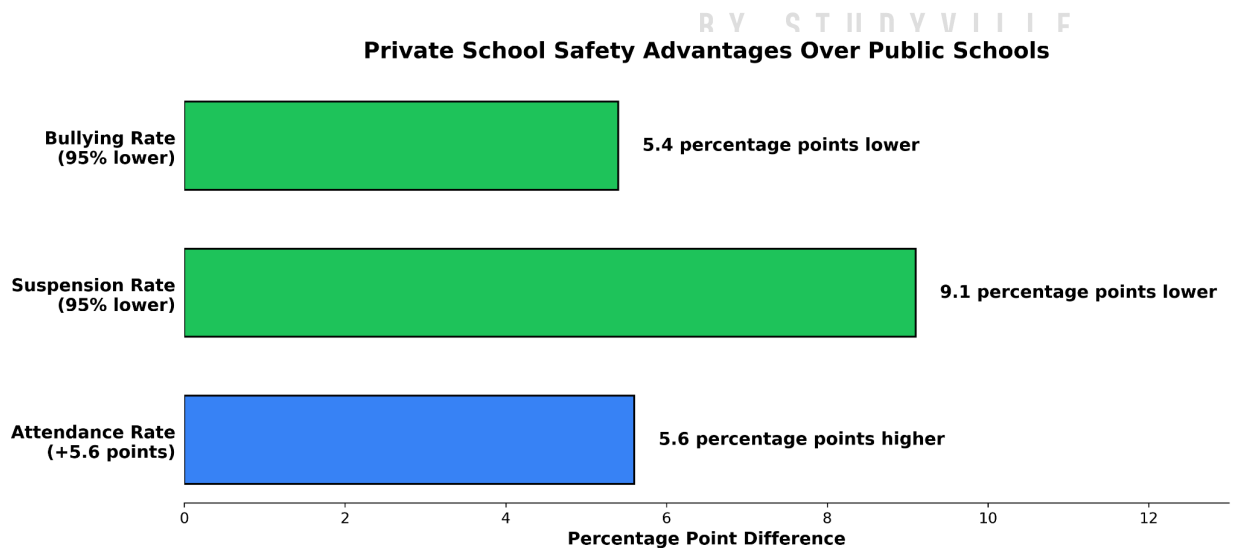


Figure 2.1 Surveved Private School Safety Advantages. Source: Surveved Private Schools (2026); Louisiana Department of Education (2023)

2.4.2 Real-World Impact Translation

These percentage-point differences represent substantial real-world impact. In a school serving 300 students (the average enrollment among responding private schools), the bullying reduction translates to approximately **16 fewer reported incidents annually**. The suspension reduction means **27 fewer disciplinary actions** requiring removal from the classroom. The attendance improvement adds **nearly 1,000 additional student-days of instruction** across the school year, equivalent to over three full school days per student.

2.4.3 Safety Advantage Independent of Geographic Relocation TM

Critically, these improvements occur independent of geographic relocation. Private schools in Very High crime cities (Baton Rouge, Monroe, New Orleans) appear to achieve similarly low bullying and suspension rates as schools in Low crime rural communities (Winnsboro, Coushatta). **The safety advantage comes from school selection itself** in the choice of smaller class sizes, consistent discipline policies, engaged parent communities, and aligned values rather **than from relocating to safer neighborhoods**. ESA enables families to prioritize these school-level factors regardless of where they live.

2.5 Faster Emergency Response Access at Private Schools

Geographic analysis of all 190 GATOR participating schools reveals systematic emergency response advantages compared to Louisiana's 1,379 public schools. **Geographic analysis indicates that the average modeled emergency response time to participating private schools was 6.81 minutes compared to 9.08 minutes for public schools.**

Response modeling reflects geographic proximity and infrastructure variables and does not evaluate actual incident-level response performance.

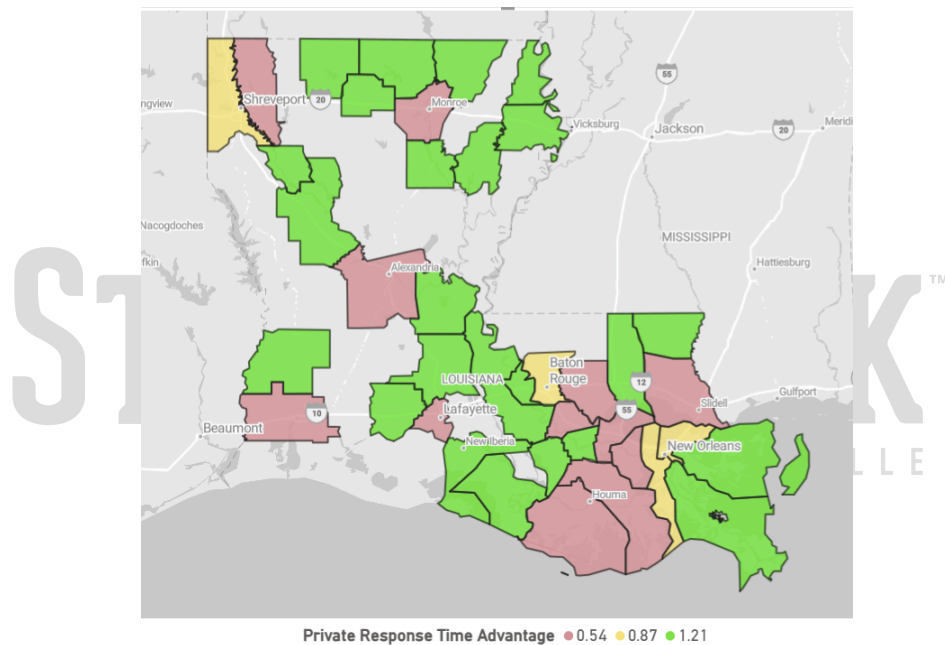


Figure 2.2 Private Response Time Advantage

Source: IsoChronAPI (n.d.); NFPA Emergency Response Standards

2.5.1 Emergency Response Analysis Overview

Overall Emergency Response Performance:

- Private GATOR schools (n=190): **6.81 minutes average**

- Public schools (n=1,379): **9.08 minutes average**
- **Advantage: 2.28 minutes faster (25.1% improvement)**

By Location Type:

- **Urban parishes** (88 GATOR schools): 4.80 min vs 5.67 min = **0.87 min faster**
- **Suburban parishes** (59 GATOR schools): 7.25 min vs 7.79 min = **0.54 min faster**
- **Rural parishes** (43 GATOR schools): 10.31 min vs 11.52 min = **1.21 min faster**

2.5.2 Why This Matters

Emergency response time improvements of 2.28 minutes represent meaningful real-world impact during medical emergencies (allergic reactions, cardiac events), security incidents (quicker law enforcement arrival), and fire/hazard events (reduced evacuation risk). **Faster response improves survival rates in critical minutes.**

2.5.3 Factors Contributing to Advantage

- **Strategic location selection** near established infrastructure and emergency services
- **Clear addressing and campus access** for rapid first responder navigation
- **Proactive emergency coordination** with local fire, EMS, and law enforcement
- **Campus size optimization** (averaging 331 students) reducing dispatch complexity

2.6 Parent-Reported Conduct and Discipline

2.6.1 Overview

Parent-reported experiences were directionally consistent with institutional reporting within the participating sample. Two-thirds of families (67.6%) report their children's conduct improved following private school enrollment, with 95.2% experiencing zero disciplinary incidents and 96.2% reporting no suspensions. These parent-reported outcomes align closely with institutional data showing exceptionally low suspension rates (0.5%) and minimal bullying incidents (0.3%) across participating schools.

2.6.2 Conduct Improvements

Two-thirds of families (67.6%) report their children's conduct improved since enrolling in private schools through GATOR scholarships. An additional 24.8% indicate uncertainty about conduct changes, while only 7.6% report no improvement. The high "unsure" percentage likely reflects families whose children already demonstrated strong conduct, making improvements difficult to observe. Among families confident enough to assess conduct changes, approximately 90% report improvement.

Conduct Improvement:

- Conduct improved: 67.6%
- Unsure: 24.8%
- No improvement: 7.6%

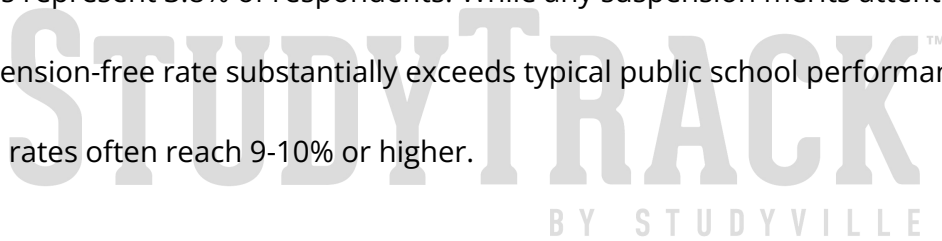
2.6.3 Disciplinary Incidents and Suspensions

Parent reports validate exceptionally low disciplinary rates found in institutional data.

Among 105 families, 95.2% report their children experienced zero disciplinary incidents at their current private schools. Only five families (4.8%) report any disciplinary involvement.

The high percentage of families reporting no disciplinary incidents aligns with institutional data indicating low average suspension rates among participating schools.

Suspension data reinforces this pattern. Among responding families, 96.2% report their children experienced no suspensions at private schools. The four families reporting suspensions represent 3.8% of respondents. While any suspension merits attention, the 96.2% suspension-free rate substantially exceeds typical public school performance, where suspension rates often reach 9-10% or higher.



Disciplinary Metrics:

- Zero disciplinary incidents: 95.2%
- Zero suspensions: 96.2%
- Families experiencing any discipline: 4.8%
- Families experiencing suspensions: 3.8%

Parent-Reported Safety Outcomes: GATOR vs. Louisiana Public Schools

Based on 105 Parent Survey Responses

Safety Metric	GATOR Schools (Parent Reports, n=105)	Louisiana Public Schools (State Averages)	GATOR Advantage
Zero Disciplinary Incidents	95.2%	~5-10% (typical incident rates)	85-90 points better
Zero Suspensions	96.2%	9.6% (suspension rate)	93 points better
Conduct Improved	67.6%	Not measured	Strong parent-reported gains
Zero Chronic Absenteeism	100.0%	~85% (15% chronic absent)	15 points better

Figure 2.3 Parent-Reported Safety Outcomes: GATOR vs. Louisiana Public Schools.
Source: GATOR Parent Survey (2026)

2.6.4 Validation of Institutional Safety Findings

Parent survey responses validate institutional safety data reported earlier in this analysis. Schools reported 0.3% bullying incident rates and 0.5% suspension rates based on institutional records. Parent reports show 95.2% experiencing zero disciplinary incidents and 96.2% experiencing zero suspensions, closely aligning with institutional metrics. This convergence suggests both data sources accurately reflect GATOR school safety environments rather than representing reporting artifacts or selection bias.

The consistency between institutional records and parent perceptions matters for policy evaluation. When school-reported data and family-experienced outcomes align, it suggests findings reflect genuine program characteristics rather than measurement artifacts. The close correspondence between Pillar II's institutional safety findings and parent-reported

experiences validates the conclusion that GATOR schools maintain substantially safer, more orderly environments than typical Louisiana public schools.

2.6.5 Data Source Convergence

- Institutional bullying rate: 0.3% → Parent zero-incident rate: 95.2%
- Institutional suspension rate: 0.5% → Parent zero-suspension rate: 96.2%
- Both sources show 95%+ families/students experience no safety issues

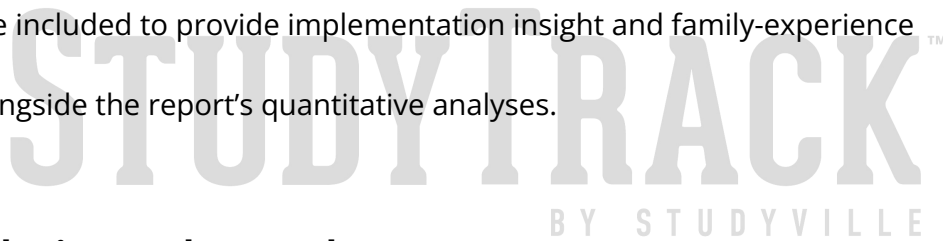
2.6.6 Observations from Parent-Reported Data

Parent perspectives on conduct and safety support several policy conclusions. First, families perceive meaningful behavioral improvements following transitions to private schools through GATOR. The 67.6% reporting conduct improvement, combined with near-universal absence of disciplinary problems and suspensions, indicates private school environments differ substantially from prior public school experiences in ways families value and observe.

Second, the convergence between parent-reported outcomes and institutional safety metrics validates earlier findings that GATOR schools maintain safer, more orderly environments than Louisiana public schools. When multiple data sources, including institutional records, parent perceptions, and comparative public school statistics, align around the same conclusions, confidence in findings increases substantially.

Third, parent survey data makes it harder to dismiss institutional findings as selective reporting or measurement artifacts. Unless families systematically misperceive their children's school experiences, an implausible claim given the specificity of questions and consistency of responses, GATOR schools genuinely provide safer, more orderly environments than Louisiana public schools, particularly for the economically disadvantaged families the program primarily serves.

For qualitative parent descriptions of school climate, conduct change, and perceived safety after transition, see Appendix A. Appendix A presents qualitative parent testimony from a small, non-representative sample of LA GATOR participants. The findings are included to provide implementation insight and family-experience context alongside the report's quantitative analyses.



2.7 Conclusion and Key Takeaways

2.7.1 Summary of Observed School Climate Indicators

For Louisiana families evaluating school choice through the GATOR ESA program, reporting schools, observed patterns suggest four potential safety-related differences:

- **Internal Culture:** Reported bullying rates of 0.3% among surveyed schools compared to 5.7% statewide public benchmarks (based on surveyed schools, 2025-2026 school year)

- **Attendance:** 5.6 percentage points higher attendance reducing unsupervised time
- **Geographic Access:** Schools operating across Louisiana's full crime spectrum, **38.4% in Very High crime zones**, enabling choice without relocation
- **Emergency Response:** 2.28 minutes faster average emergency service arrival across 41 parishes

These advantages stem from school-level choices regarding culture, discipline, location, and emergency preparedness that families can prioritize through ESA and not from geographic relocation to safer neighborhoods. The program's statewide reach of 66 cities and 101 zip codes demonstrates that safety improvements through school choice are accessible to Louisiana families regardless of where they live.

2.7.2 Key Takeaways

- Analysis encompasses **100% of GATOR participating schools** (190 schools) across **64% of Louisiana's parishes**
- **38.4% of schools operate in Very High crime zones**, ESA enables choice within existing communities, not geographic escape
- Reporting private schools achieve **95% lower bullying and suspension rates** regardless of city crime levels
- **2.28 minutes faster emergency response** provides measurable safety advantage across all location types

- School-level factors (discipline, culture, emergency coordination) drive safety outcomes more than city crime rates

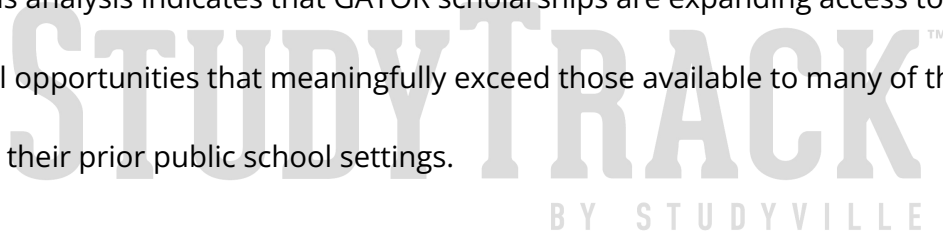
*Note: School climate data was submitted voluntarily by 27 of 190 participating GATOR schools, representing approximately 1,300 students. Schools that opted into safety reporting may not be representative of all GATOR-participating schools. These figures should be interpreted as descriptive of the reporting sample, not as a program-wide average.



PILLAR III - ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 Overview and Analytical Scope

The third pillar of this evaluation examines the academic opportunities available to GATOR students, including coursework, instructional quality, support systems, and learning environments that distinguish their current educational experience from what was previously accessible in Louisiana’s public schools. Drawing on institutional data from 190 participating schools serving 1,300 GATOR students, along with survey responses from 105 families, this analysis indicates that GATOR scholarships are expanding access to educational opportunities that meaningfully exceed those available to many of these students in their prior public school settings.



3.2 Access to Advanced Coursework and College Preparation

3.2.1 Advanced Coursework Availability

One of the most significant advantages GATOR students gain is access to rigorous, college-preparatory coursework that positions them for post-secondary success. Among the surveyed schools, five reported offering a combined 223 Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment courses. While this data comes from a limited sample reflecting the reality that many smaller K-8 schools do not offer these

advanced options, the schools that do provide such opportunities are making substantial investments in preparing students for higher education. For context, Louisiana public schools enrolled 32,577 high school students in dual enrollment courses during 2022-23, representing a 13% year-over-year increase in participation. However, no comparable statewide data exists for private school advanced course participation, making the voluntary reporting from these five GATOR schools particularly valuable for understanding program offerings (Louisiana Board of Regents, 2023).

3.2.2 Public School Context and Course Access Restraints

These opportunities stand in stark contrast to the access challenges facing many Louisiana public school students. Louisiana's Course Choice program was created precisely because many public schools do not offer the full range of AP, IB, or dual enrollment courses on campus, requiring students to seek these opportunities through external providers. For GATOR students whose previous public schools lacked these offerings, their current private schools represent a significant expansion of academic opportunity, particularly for students at schools like Mount Carmel Academy, which offers 169 advanced courses, or Parkview Baptist School, which provides 20 such options across its PK3-12 program.

3.2.3 College and Career Counseling Capacity

Supporting this advanced coursework, the responding schools collectively employ 11.5 full-time equivalent college and career counselors, an average of 0.72 FTE per school. This

level of dedicated guidance helps students navigate the college application process, identify scholarship opportunities, and make informed decisions about their post-secondary paths. The investment in college counseling appears to be producing results: as documented in Pillar I, GATOR students achieved an 88.1% college enrollment rate and an average ACT score of 21, compared to Louisiana's public school average of 18.2.

FINDING 1: Academic Opportunity Ecosystem

How GATOR School Inputs Produce Strong Outcomes

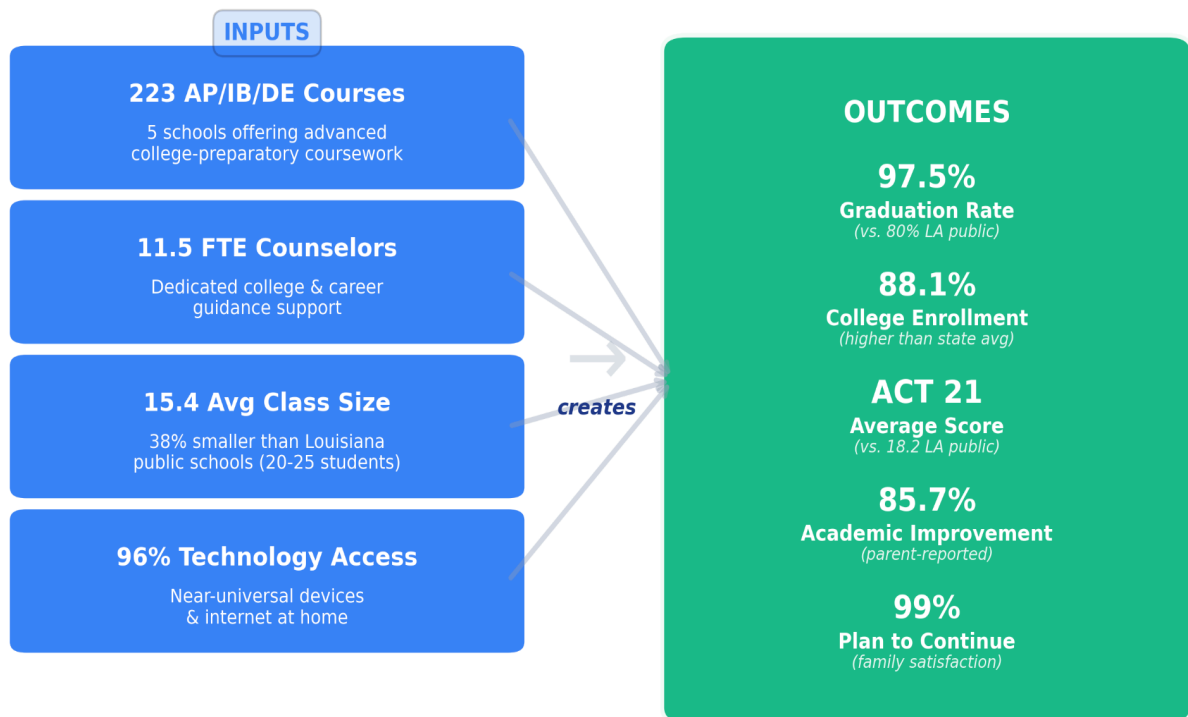


Figure 3.1 Academic Opportunity Ecosystem. Source: Surveyed Private Schools (2026)

3.2.4 Advanced Course Access:

- 223 AP/IB/Dual Enrollment courses across reporting schools
- Average of 44.6 courses per school offering these options
- Range of 4 to 169 courses available at individual schools
- 11.5 FTE college/career counselors supporting post-secondary planning

3.3 Small Class Sizes Enable Individualized Instruction

3.3.1 Class Size Comparison and Public Baseline

Perhaps the most consistently reported advantage across GATOR schools is the dramatically smaller class sizes that enable teachers to provide individualized attention to each student. Among the 21 schools reporting class size data, the average class contains 15.4 students, a figure that contrasts sharply with Louisiana's public schools, where Louisiana law funds classes at ratios of 20:1 for kindergarten through grade three and 25:1 for grades four through six (Surveyed Private Schools, 2026). While Louisiana's public schools average a student-teacher ratio of 14:1 overall (comparable to the national average of 16:1), the reality of larger class sizes means that individual students receive less direct instructional time and personalized feedback than their peers in GATOR schools.

3.3.2 Why Smaller Classes Matter Instructionally

This difference in class size translates directly into educational opportunity. In a class of 15 rather than 25 students, teachers have 67% more time to devote to each child. They can differentiate instruction more effectively, identify learning gaps more quickly, and provide the kind of responsive teaching that meets students where they are. For students who previously struggled in larger public school classrooms, particularly those with learning differences or those who simply need more individualized support, this reduction in class size represents a fundamental transformation in their educational experience.

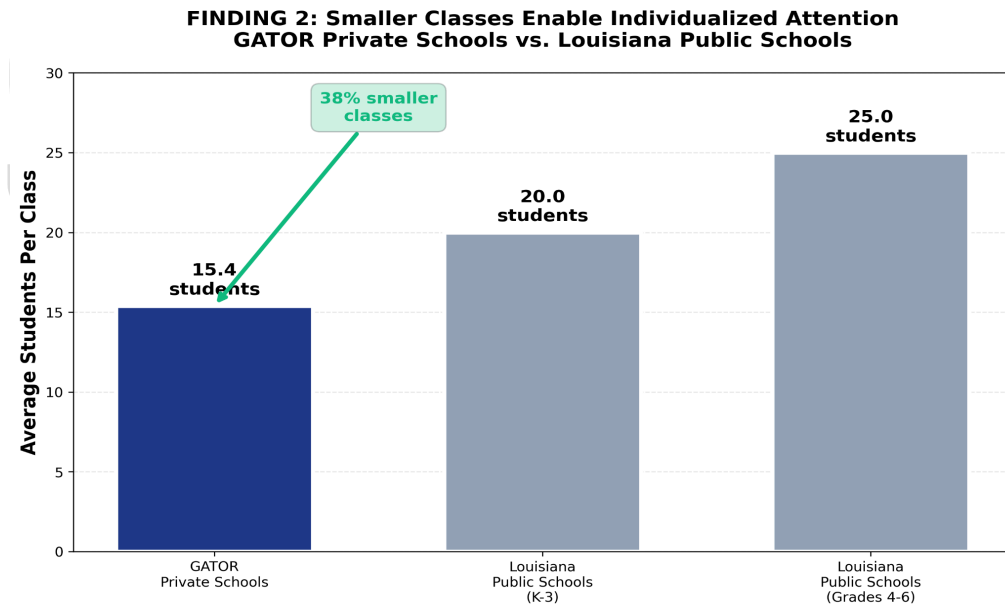


Figure 3.2 Smaller Classes Enable Individualized Attention: GATOR Private Schools vs. Louisiana Public Schools. Source: Surveyed Private Schools (2026); Louisiana Department of Education (2024)

3.3.3 Parent Engagement as a Complement to Small-Class Instruction

The parent survey data reinforces the impact of these smaller learning environments.

Parents report high levels of engagement with their children's education: 92.4% help with homework weekly, with families spending between one and five hours per week supporting their children's learning. This combination of small classes at school and strong support at home creates an academic ecosystem that many families lacked access to in their previous public school settings. As one data point suggests, this ecosystem is working: 85.7% of surveyed families report that their child's academic progress has improved since receiving the GATOR scholarship, with 67.6% describing the improvement as "much better."

3.3.4 Class Size Comparison:

- GATOR private schools: 15.4 students average (21 schools reporting)
- Louisiana public schools: Funded at 20:1 (K-3) and 25:1 (grades 4-6)
- Range in GATOR schools: 6 to 21 students per class
- 92.4% of GATOR families provide weekly homework support

3.4 Technology Access and Learning Resources

3.4.1 Household Technology and Internet Access

In an increasingly digital educational landscape, access to technology represents a critical component of academic opportunity. The parent survey reveals that GATOR families have

achieved near-universal technology access: 96.2% have computers or internet-accessible devices at home, and 95.2% have reliable internet connections. These figures suggest that GATOR schools and families have successfully overcome the digital divide that often limits educational opportunity for lower-income families; a particularly noteworthy achievement given that many GATOR families qualified for the scholarship based on economic need.

3.4.2 Limits of Current Measurement (Usage vs. Access)

Parent survey data indicates strong technology access at home among GATOR families: 96.2% report having computers or internet-accessible devices, and 95.2% have home internet access. Whether this home technology access translates to enhanced learning outcomes or improved digital literacy remains unmeasured in this evaluation. Small class sizes (15.4 students average) may facilitate more individualized technology instruction compared to larger public school classes averaging approximately 22 students, though this study collected no data comparing actual classroom technology resources or usage patterns between GATOR schools and public schools.

3.4.3 Parent-School Communication and Support Infrastructure

Beyond technology, the parent survey data reveals strong engagement with their children's schools. Families report attending an average of 0.8 parent-teacher conferences per year (with a median of one), though the limited response rate on this question suggests that many families may not have tracked this specific metric. More significantly, the open-ended

responses reveal that parents value the accessibility of teachers and administrators at private schools; a stark change from their previous public school experiences where bureaucratic barriers often made direct communication more difficult.

Appendix A provides qualitative examples from participating parent focus groups on communication, accessibility, and school support systems. Additional qualitative context is provided in Appendix A, which presents de-identified findings from three LA GATOR parent focus groups. These findings are illustrative and are intended to complement, rather than replace, the report's quantitative analysis.

3.4.4 Technology and Support Infrastructure in LA GATOR Recipient

Homes

- 96.2% of families have computers/devices at home
- 95.2% have reliable internet access
- 92.4% provide weekly homework support
- Strong parent-teacher communication and accessibility

3.5 Serving Diverse Learners and Special Populations

3.5.1 Student Learning Profiles and Population Diversity

An important question in evaluating school choice programs is whether they serve all students or only those without additional learning needs. The parent survey data reveals

that GATOR schools are indeed serving students with diverse learning profiles: 11.4% of surveyed students have identified disabilities, and an additional 11.4% participate in English Language Learner (ELL) programs. While these percentages are lower than some public school districts, reflecting both the self-selection inherent in school choice and the different classification systems used in private schools, they demonstrate that GATOR schools are not simply serving the easiest-to-educate students.

3.5.2 Variation in Special Education Service Models

The institutional data from responding schools reveals a variety of approaches to serving students with special needs. Eighteen schools provided information about special education services, with responses ranging from comprehensive support programs to limited services (often speech therapy only) to partnerships with local public school districts for specialized services. This variation reflects the diversity of private school models, some schools specialize in serving students with learning differences, while others focus on different strengths. The key insight is not that every GATOR school provides identical services, but rather that families now have choices: they can select schools whose approach and services align with their child's specific needs.

3.5.3 School Fit, Behavioral Outcomes, and Student Support

For many GATOR families, this ability to choose a school environment that fits their child represents a significant improvement over their previous public school experience. The

parent survey reveals that 67.6% of families report improvements in their child's conduct since enrolling in private school, with 95.2% reporting zero disciplinary incidents and 96.2% reporting zero suspensions. These behavioral improvements suggest that many students have found school environments where they feel more engaged, more supported, and more successful, outcomes that create the foundation for academic achievement.

Special Populations and Inclusion:

- 11.4% of GATOR students have identified disabilities
- 11.4% participate in ELL programs
- 18 schools report offering special education services (varied models)
- 67.6% of families report improved student conduct since enrollment

3.6 Quality Assurance Through Assessment and Accountability

BY STUDYVILLE

3.6.1 Standardized Testing Practices

GATOR schools demonstrate commitment to quality education through participation in assessment and accountability systems. Among the private schools that reported their standardized testing practices, common assessments include IOWA, STAR, NWEA, Terra Nova, and ACT preparation tests. Additionally, 12 reported participating in Louisiana's state testing system, either fully or for scholarship compliance, ensuring that GATOR students are assessed using the same standards as their public school peers.

3.6.2 Accreditation and External Review

Regarding accreditation, several schools reported their status: three hold SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) accreditation, four are accredited by Cognia (formerly AdvancED), and ten reported "other" accreditation, which typically includes state-level approval, denominational accreditation, or regional accrediting bodies. While private schools have more flexibility in choosing their accrediting organizations than public schools, the commitment to external review and quality standards demonstrates that GATOR schools are not operating in an unregulated environment; they are choosing to subject themselves to rigorous external evaluation.

3.6.3 Accountability Through Parent Decision-Making

This combination of standardized assessment and external accreditation provides accountability safeguards while preserving the autonomy that makes private schools distinctive. Parents can review accreditation status, test score data, and school performance information when making enrollment decisions, ensuring that market accountability complements regulatory oversight in maintaining educational quality.

Assessment and Accountability:

- 89% of schools use standardized assessments
- 44% participate in Louisiana state testing
- 67% hold external accreditation

- Common assessments: IOWA, STAR, NWEA, Terra Nova, ACT

3.7 The Parent Perspective: Measurable Academic Growth

3.7.1 Parent-Reported Academic Improvement

Beyond institutional metrics and policy comparisons, the parent survey provides compelling evidence that GATOR students are experiencing meaningful academic growth. When asked to describe their child's academic progress since receiving the GATOR scholarship, 85.7% of families (90 of 105) reported improvement, with 67.6% describing the improvement as "much better" and 18.1% reporting that progress was "better." Only 12.4% indicated that progress remained "about the same," and just 1.9% were unsure.™

3.7.2 Academic and Social-Emotional Growth Alignment

These perceptions of academic improvement align with the social-emotional gains documented in Pillar II: 83.8% of families reported that their child's social-emotional progress had improved since enrolling in their current school (GATOR Parent Survey, 2026). The combination of academic and social-emotional growth suggests that GATOR students have found learning environments where they are both challenged academically and supported personally; an alignment that many families struggled to find in their previous public schools.

3.7.3 Satisfaction and Perceived Opportunity Gains

The satisfaction data tells a complementary story. As documented in Pillar I, 42.9% of families rated their prior public school experience at 0 out of 5, while 78.1% now rate their current private school experience at 5 out of 5. This dramatic shift in satisfaction stems not from lowered expectations but from tangible improvements in academic opportunity: smaller classes, more individualized attention, access to advanced coursework, better technology infrastructure, and school cultures that better align with families' values and their children's needs.

Parent-Reported Academic Outcomes:

- 85.7% report academic improvement since GATOR enrollment
- 79.0% report social-emotional improvement
- 99% would recommend GATOR to other families
- 99% plan to continue using GATOR scholarships

3.8 Interpreting Teacher Certification and Qualification Data

3.8.1 Certification and Advanced Degree Reporting

The institutional data reveals that among private schools reporting teacher certification information, the average certification rate is 74.9%, with a wide reported range from 0.8% to 90%. 8.6% of teachers at reporting schools hold advanced degrees (master's or doctoral

degrees), compared to higher percentages in Louisiana's public schools where certification and advanced degrees are often required for employment and salary advancement.

3.8.2 Methodological Cautions and Interpretation Limits

Teacher certification rates average 74.9% across responding schools. Private schools in Louisiana operate under different certification requirements than public schools, which may reflect varied hiring priorities across institutions. Without data on teacher qualifications, subject expertise, or the relationship between certification status and student outcomes, this evaluation cannot determine whether lower certification rates represent a program strength, weakness, or neutral characteristic. Future evaluation could examine teacher credentials, professional experience, and their relationship to student academic performance.

3.8.3 Outcome-Based Framing and Alternative Explanations

The relevant question is whether participating schools produce measurable educational outcomes. Available evidence from Pillar I shows that responding GATOR schools achieved a 97.5% graduation rate (compared to Louisiana's public school rate of approximately 80%), an 88.1% college enrollment rate, and an average ACT score of 21 (compared to 18.2 for public school students) (Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.). However, these outcomes must be interpreted cautiously. Among responding schools, 26% explicitly use ACT testing and 19% offer advanced coursework including AP, IB, or dual enrollment

courses. Schools offering ACT preparation courses and extensive college preparatory programs may produce higher scores independent of overall instructional quality (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Additionally, self-reported institutional data from responding schools who provided educational information may not represent all 190 GATOR participating schools, and the lack of baseline data from students' prior public school performance prevents assessment of whether observed outcomes reflect GATOR school effectiveness or pre-existing student characteristics.

3.8.4 Teacher Retention and School Environment

Moreover, the teacher retention data suggests that GATOR schools are creating work environments where teachers choose to stay. While comprehensive retention data was not available across all schools, the combination of smaller class sizes, supportive school cultures, and mission-aligned communities likely contributes to teacher satisfaction and longevity, even if the salary scales differ from public school compensation structures.

3.9 Policy Implications: Expanding Opportunity Through Choice

3.9.1 Core Policy Finding

The academic opportunity data reveals a central finding: GATOR scholarships are expanding access to educational opportunities that many Louisiana families could not otherwise afford. Small class sizes, advanced coursework, college counseling, technology

infrastructure, and personalized attention represent significant investments that private schools make in student success; investments that translate into the measurable outcomes documented in Pillar I and the safety advantages documented in Pillar II.

3.9.2 Comparative Opportunity and School Variation

For policymakers evaluating whether to continue and expand the GATOR program, the academic opportunity data addresses a fundamental question: Are GATOR students receiving a different and potentially better educational experience than what was available in their previous public schools? The evidence suggests yes. While individual school quality varies, as it does in both public and private sectors, GATOR students on average are attending schools with smaller classes, more advanced course offerings, better technology access, and stronger family engagement than their previous public school experiences provided.

3.9.3 Cost-Effectiveness and Fiscal Context

This expansion of opportunity comes at a lower cost to taxpayers. As documented in Pillar I, Louisiana spends \$16,294 per student in public schools (including capital expenses), while the average GATOR scholarship amount is \$7,220, a taxpayer savings of \$9,074 per student. The question is not whether private schools replicate every aspect of public school operations, but whether they provide effective educational opportunities that justify public investment. By this standard, GATOR schools are succeeding. Recall Pillar I where if the

1,300 students analyzed in this evaluation had remained in Louisiana public schools at the 50-parish average cost of \$17,778 per student in these GATOR Parishes, Louisiana would expend \$23.1 million annually on their education. Under GATOR, these students receive scholarships averaging \$7,220, for a total program cost of \$9.4 million annually. This represents \$3 million in annual taxpayer savings, or \$2,348 per student. Over a five-year period (typical elementary school duration), the currently analyzed group of 1,300 students will generate \$15.2 million in cumulative savings compared to traditional public school attendance.

3.9.4 Data Gaps and Future Evaluation Priorities

The academic opportunity data also identifies areas where additional information could inform policy decisions. Tracking participation in advanced coursework across all GATOR schools, collecting standardized professional development data for teachers, and establishing consistent mechanisms for measuring student academic growth over time would address current data limitations. The available evidence shows that participating schools offer varied academic programs, with some providing extensive advanced coursework while others focus on smaller class sizes and individualized instruction. Whether these educational approaches produce outcomes justifying program investment remains a determination for policymakers based on their assessment of the evidence presented across all five evaluation pillars.

3.10 Conclusion

3.10.1 Academic Opportunity as Total Learning Environment

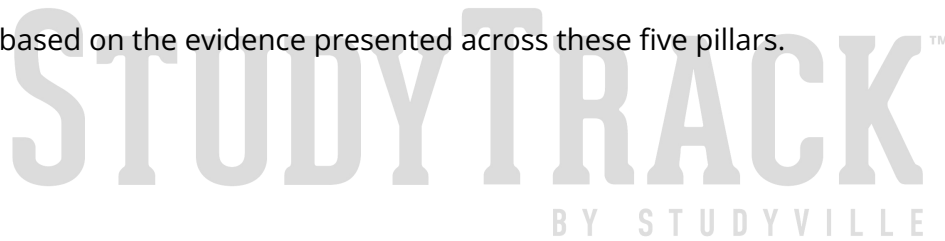
Academic opportunity represents more than just the courses listed in a school's catalog or the credentials hanging on teachers' walls. It encompasses the totality of the learning environment: the attention each student receives, the expectations teachers hold, the support systems families can access, and the alignment between a school's culture and a child's needs. By these measures, GATOR students are experiencing significant advantages over what was available in their previous public schools.

3.10.2 Summary of Observable Opportunity Advantages

Small classes of 15 students instead of 25. Access to 223 advanced courses preparing students for college (Surveyed Private Schools, 2026). Nearly universal technology access at home enabling digital learning. Engaged families providing weekly homework support. School cultures where 96% of students experience zero disciplinary incidents and 95% have zero suspensions. These are not abstract policy goals; they are the daily reality for GATOR students, and they explain why 85.7% of families report academic improvement and 99% plan to continue their enrollment.

3.10.3 Program Evaluation Context and Legislative Decision Point

The academic opportunity data adds to the program evaluation findings across cost, outcomes, and environment. Louisiana's GATOR program provides vouchers averaging \$7,220 per student, substantially less than traditional public school expenditures while participating families report high satisfaction and perceive academic improvement. For the 1,300 students currently enrolled in responding schools and the thousands more accessing GATOR scholarships across Louisiana, the program represents one educational option among several available pathways. Whether these findings justify program expansion, modification, or continuation remains a policy question for Louisiana's legislature to determine based on the evidence presented across these five pillars.



PILLAR IV: CAMPUS LIFE

4.1 Overview and Analytical Scope

4.1.1 Definition of Campus Life & Community

Pillar IV examines the lived student and family experience beyond academics. It focuses on extracurricular participation, parent involvement, school culture, mission alignment, belonging, and satisfaction.

Campus Life & Community addresses the human dimension of schooling: whether students are engaged, whether families are connected, and whether school environments foster belonging and alignment with family values.

4.1.2 Data Sources and Limits

This analysis draws from:

- Institutional reporting from 27 participating schools
- Parent survey responses from 105 families

While these data provide meaningful insight, reporting is not uniform across all 190 schools. Where data are limited, this section identifies areas for further exploration rather than extending beyond the evidence available.

Of those surveyed, campus life analyses showed outcomes including high participation rates, exceptional parental satisfaction, increased student involvement, and strong student retention. The ecosystem suggests that campus life may contribute to the outcomes documented throughout this evaluation, alongside academic and other institutional factors.

The central finding of this pillar is that GATOR students demonstrate high extracurricular participation and high satisfaction despite schools offering fewer total programs than public school counterparts.

This suggests that access, culture, and community structure may drive engagement more than sheer program volume.



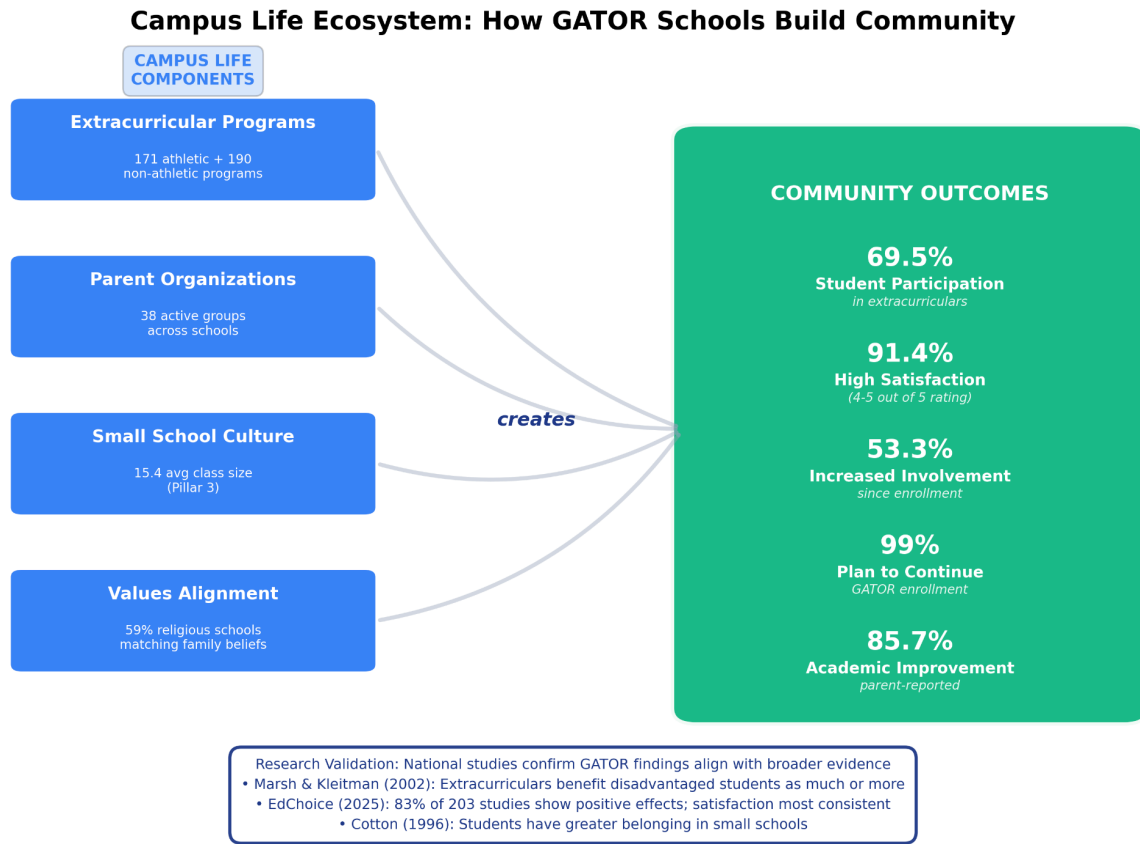


Figure 4.1 Campus Life Ecosystem: How GATOR Schools Build Community. Source: GATOR Parent Survey (2026); Surveyed Private Schools (2026)

4.2 Extracurriculars, Sports, and Clubs

4.2.1 Participation Rates and Change from Prior Schooling

Among surveyed families:

- **69.5%** report their child participates in extracurricular activities.
- **53.3%** report increased involvement compared to prior public schooling.
- **66.7%** plan to continue participation.

These participation rates occur even though GATOR schools report fewer total programs at middle and high school levels than public schools.

4.2.2 Program Availability vs. Program Access

Comparative reporting shows:

- Public high schools: median **72 athletic** and **72 non-athletic** programs.
- GATOR high schools: median **10 athletic** and **5 non-athletic** programs.
- Public middle schools: median **24 programs** per category.
- GATOR middle schools: typically **2–3 programs** per category.

Only at the elementary level do GATOR schools slightly exceed public schools in median offerings.

Despite fewer program options, participation increases for many students. One plausible interpretation supported by parent responses is that smaller school environments reduce barriers to entry—less competition for roster spots, leadership positions, and activity access.

Further statewide, student-level participation tracking would strengthen the precision of this comparison.

4.2.3 School-Reported Program Offerings and Variation

Among 27 reporting schools:

- Average **6.8 athletic programs** per school
- Average **7.3 non-athletic programs** per school

Offerings include traditional sports (football, basketball, volleyball), performing arts (choir, drama), academic competitions (debate, speech), and service activities.

Some schools report significantly larger offerings, while others operate smaller activity portfolios consistent with school size.

Across all 190 schools:

- **171 athletic programs systemwide** (~0.9 per school average)
- **190 non-athletic programs systemwide** (~1.0 per school average)

These systemwide averages reflect significant variation and should be interpreted cautiously.

4.2.4 Parent-Reported Participation and Involvement Growth

The parent survey data confirms these opportunities are actively utilized despite limited variety. Among 105 surveyed families, 69.5% report their child participates in extracurricular activities. More significantly, 53.3% of all GATOR families report increased

involvement since enrolling in private schools, and 66.7% plan to continue participation.

Survey responses reveal participation in traditional team sports (football, basketball, baseball, volleyball, soccer), individual athletics (gymnastics, swimming, tennis), performing arts (drama, musical theater, choir), academic competitions (debate, speech), and service organizations.

Survey responses reflect participation across:

- Team athletics
- Individual athletics
- Performing arts
- Academic competitions
- Service organizations



This diversity indicates that even where offerings are smaller in number, students are accessing a range of developmental opportunities.

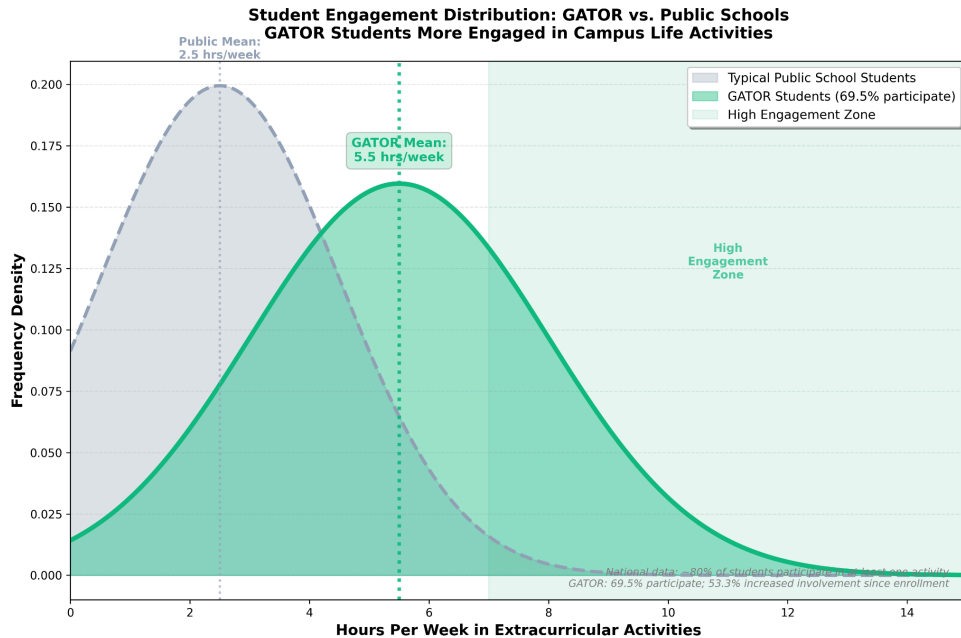


Figure 4.2 Student Engagement Distribution: GATOR vs. Public Schools Source: Surveyed Private Schools (2026); Louisiana Department of Education (2024); National Center for Education Statistics (2016)

4.2.5 Extracurricular Program Data

- 69.5% student participation
- 53.3% increased involvement
- 66.7% plan to continue
- 6.8 athletic / 7.3 non-athletic programs (27-school sample)
- 171 athletic / 190 non-athletic programs across 190 schools

Further exploration is needed to:

- Track number of activities per student
- Measure leadership roles and sustained participation

- Standardize reporting across all participating schools

4.3 Parent Involvement and Parent Organizations

4.3.1 Parent Organization Infrastructure

Beyond student activities, GATOR schools demonstrate strong parent involvement through formal parent organizations that support school operations, fundraise for programs, coordinate volunteer efforts, and build community connections among families. Among the schools reporting data on parent organizations, the total count reaches 38 active parent organizations at an average of 1.5 organizations per school.

Although the total number of reported parent organizations is limited, this may be influenced by school size and structure. Fourteen schools report one active parent organization (typically a PTO, PTA, or school advisory council), while some larger schools report multiple groups serving different functions, such as separate elementary and high school parent associations, athletic or arts booster clubs, mothers' or fathers' organizations, and committees focused on facilities, fundraising, or events.

4.3.2 Parent Perspectives on Community and Connection

Parent engagement extends beyond formal structures:

- **92.4%** of surveyed families report providing weekly homework support.
- Parents describe involvement in teacher activities, events, and school initiatives.

The private school structure appears to facilitate more direct access to teachers and administrators compared to large district bureaucracies.

The parent survey data reinforces the value families place on community connections.

When asked about the most positive aspects of the GATOR scholarship, multiple families specifically mentioned parent involvement and the opportunity to connect with like-minded families who share similar values. Representative comments include: "The teacher and parent involved activities. I love meeting other parents and teachers that share the same values as myself for my child," and "Being able to place my children in a wonderful school and environment." These responses suggest that campus life extends beyond student programming to encompass the broader community of families who have chosen these schools together.

4.3.3 Private School Parent Involvement Model

The structure of parent involvement in private schools often differs from public school models. Rather than navigating large district bureaucracies, GATOR families report more direct access to teachers and administrators, more immediate opportunities to volunteer in meaningful ways, and stronger personal relationships with other families whose children attend the same school. This accessibility creates a sense of partnership between families and schools; a shared investment in student success that manifests in everything from classroom volunteers to athletic event attendance to fundraising campaigns that directly benefit their own children's programs.

Additionally, beyond institutional engagement, **63.5%** of surveyed families report knowing other GATOR scholarship families.

4.3.4 Research Context on Parent Engagement

Research on school choice consistently finds that parent involvement is more easily facilitated and valued in private schools compared to public schools. Parents choosing private schools report not being "pushed" away from dissatisfaction with public schools but rather "pulled" toward environments where parent engagement is structurally supported and culturally valued (Vanderbilt University study on parent preferences). This research context helps explain why GATOR families report such strong connections with teachers and administrators; the schools they have chosen are designed to welcome and incorporate family participation in ways that larger public school bureaucracies often struggle to replicate.

The current data document presence of parent organizations and engagement behaviors but do not quantify:

- Volunteer hours
- Event participation rates
- Parent leadership intensity

These would strengthen longitudinal measurement of community integration.

4.3.5 Parent Involvement Indicators

- 38 active parent organizations across 25 schools
- 92.4% of families provide weekly homework support (from Pillar III)
- Families report strong connections with teachers and administrators
- High satisfaction with parent-school communication and partnership

4.4 School Culture, Mission, and Values Alignment

4.4.1 School Identity Landscape

Among reporting schools:

- **59%** identify with Christian religious affiliations
- **7%** identify as non-religious

Families are able to choose schools aligned with their values and preferences.

4.4.2 Why Families Choose These Communities

While academics are cited as the primary reason for applying, open-ended responses frequently reference:

- Shared values
- Structured environments

- Community alignment
- Positive school culture

Families describe appreciation for environments that reinforce lessons taught at home.

4.4.3 Values Alignment as a Campus Culture Mechanism

Parents report that alignment between school mission and family values contributes to satisfaction and trust.

This alignment does not imply uniformity across schools. Rather, the GATOR framework enables pluralism: families select communities that reflect their priorities.

4.4.4 Parent-Reported Social-Emotional Progress

Social-emotional progress shows similar patterns. Among 99 responding families, 61.6%

report "much better" social-emotional development, with an additional 22.2% reporting

"better" outcomes. This means 83.8% of families perceive improvements in their children's

social-emotional wellbeing beyond purely academic gains. Only two families (2.0%) report

any decline in social-emotional functioning, indicating that private school transitions were

generally positive for students' social development.

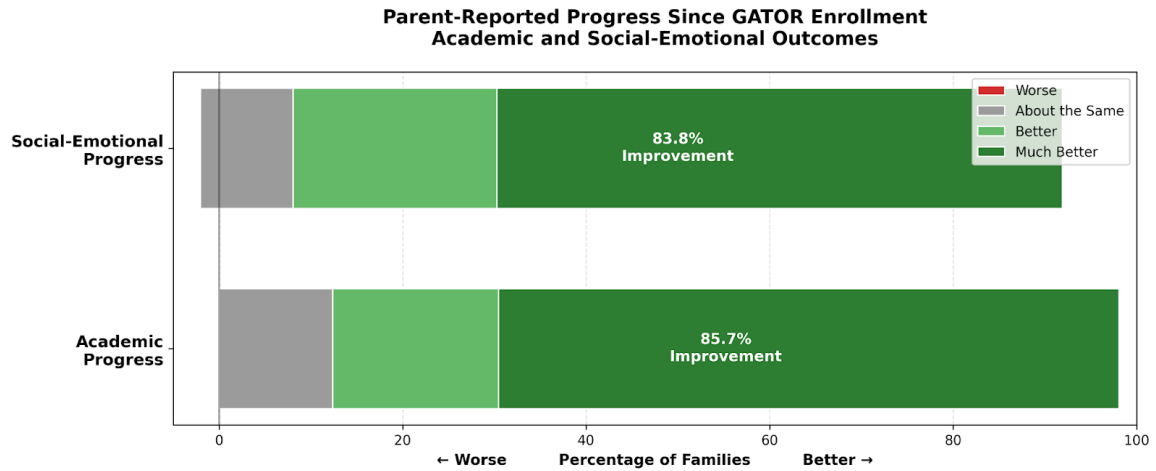
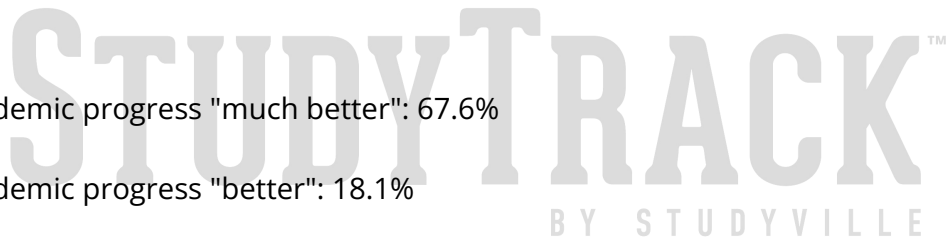


Figure 4.3 Parent-Reported Progress Since GATOR Enrollment Academic and Social-Emotional Outcomes. Source: GATOR Parent Survey (2026)

Academic and Social-Emotional Progress:

- Academic progress "much better": 67.6%
- Academic progress "better": 18.1%
- Total reporting improvement: 85.7%
- Social-emotional progress "much better": 61.6%
- Social-emotional progress "better": 22.2%
- Total social-emotional improvement: 83.8%



4.5 Religious Identity and Values Alignment Shape School Culture

4.5.1 Religious Affiliation Distribution Across GATOR Schools

A distinctive feature of many GATOR schools, and a key reason families choose them, is their religious identity and explicit values orientation. Among the 190 GATOR schools, 20 identify with Christian religious affiliations: 8 non-denominational Christian schools, 8 Catholic schools (including one Roman Catholic designation), 2 Baptist schools, 1 Assembly of God school, and 1 Protestant school. Additionally, 3 identify as "other" (which may include religious affiliations not captured in standard categories), 2 identify as non-religious, and 1 welcomes "all denominations." While this sample may not fully encapsulate all GATOR schools, it does provide insight into the extent to which participating private education providers are religiously affiliated.

The GATOR program allows families to self-select into schools that match their beliefs and expectations. This self-selection dynamic may contribute to cohesion and high satisfaction levels observed across surveyed families. Further exploration could assess how specific cultural elements correlate with retention and reported wellbeing.

4.5.2 Family Motivation and Values-Based School Selection

This religious diversity within the GATOR program reflects Louisiana's educational landscape and families' desire for schools that align with their faith traditions and values. When families were asked their primary reason for applying to the GATOR scholarship,

while 98 families cited "academics" as their top priority, the open-ended responses reveal that many families value the integration of faith, character development, and values-based education alongside academic rigor. Comments referencing "wonderful school and environment," "teachers that share the same values," and "structured environment" suggest that families are seeking more than just test scores; they want communities that reinforce the beliefs and principles they teach at home.

4.5.3 Values Alignment and Satisfaction Outcomes

The figure presents both the religious diversity within GATOR schools and the satisfaction outcomes that result from families choosing schools aligned with their values. The left panel shows that 78% of GATOR schools identify with Christian denominations, while others serve non-religious or multi-denominational populations, demonstrating the range of options available to Louisiana families. The right panel reveals that this values alignment translates into exceptional satisfaction: 78.1% rate their school 5 out of 5, 99% would recommend GATOR to others, 99% plan to continue enrollment, and 85.7% report academic improvement. The connection between mission-aligned school selection and family satisfaction validates the core premise of school choice policy.

School Identity & Family Satisfaction

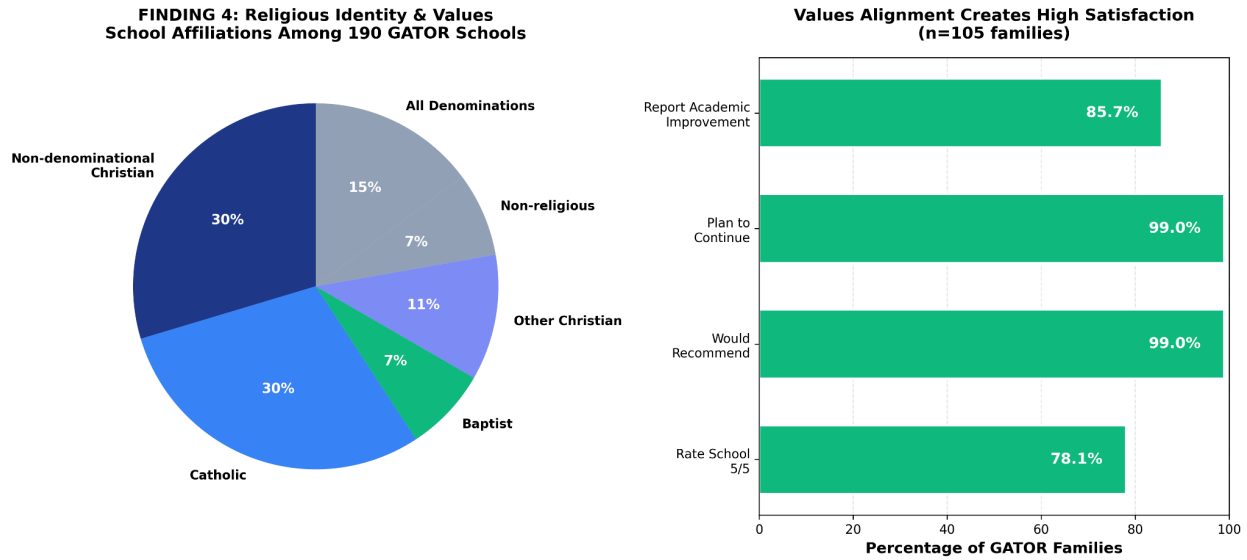


Figure 4.4 School Identity & Family Satisfaction. Source: GATOR Parent Survey (2026); Surveyed Private Schools (2026)

4.5.4 School Culture Beyond Formal Religious Instruction

The significance of values alignment extends beyond formal religious instruction. In schools with clear mission statements and shared community standards, students encounter consistent messages about respect, responsibility, integrity, and service. Parents report appreciating environments where teachers and administrators share their commitments to honesty, kindness, hard work, and moral development. This alignment between home and school creates a coherent moral framework for children, an ecosystem where the lessons taught at the dinner table are reinforced in the classroom, on the athletic field, and in interactions with peers.

4.5.5 Choice, Pluralism, and Family Autonomy

Importantly, the presence of religious schools within the GATOR program does not indicate coercion or narrow sectarianism. Families choose these schools freely, can select from schools representing different faith traditions or non-religious options, and can change schools if their needs or preferences shift. The GATOR program respects parental choice by funding whichever school families believe best serves their children's needs, whether that school is Catholic, Protestant, non-denominational, or non-religious. The common thread is not religious uniformity but rather the freedom of families to find educational communities that align with their deepest values.

4.5.6 Religious Identity and Values

- 59% of schools identify with Christian religious affiliations
- 7% identify as non-religious
- Families value schools that align with their faith and values
- Choice allows families to select schools matching their beliefs

4.6 Program Commitment and Family Retention Indicators

One indicator of campus life is the extent to which students and families report feeling part of a positive and supportive community. Based on parent survey responses, many participating families describe experiences consistent with that perception.

- **99%** plan to continue enrollment
- **99%** would recommend GATOR

These figures indicate high loyalty and perceived value.

Parent commitment metrics demonstrate high family satisfaction with GATOR ESA. When asked whether they would recommend the program to others, 104 of 105 families (99.0%) respond affirmatively. Only a single family indicates they would not recommend the program. Similarly, 99.0% of families plan to continue applying for GATOR scholarships in subsequent years, with only one family planning to discontinue.

The high recommendation and retention rates strongly suggest that survey respondents are highly satisfied with the GATOR Scholarship Program. Specifically, the 99% recommendation rate implies that families view GATOR as exceptionally valuable, actively encouraging others to enroll. This indicates the program offers benefits beyond mere tuition assistance, as families perceive significant positive changes in their children's educational experiences and changes they feel compelled to share within their communities. Notably, 67.6% of respondents also reported improved conduct since enrollment, a prominent metric for many parents.

The alignment between parent-reported satisfaction (99% would recommend) and student retention data (80% plan to continue from institutional records) validates both data sources. The slight difference likely reflects survey response bias, with highly satisfied

families more likely to complete optional surveys. Nevertheless, both metrics point to strong family commitment sustained beyond initial enrollment decisions.

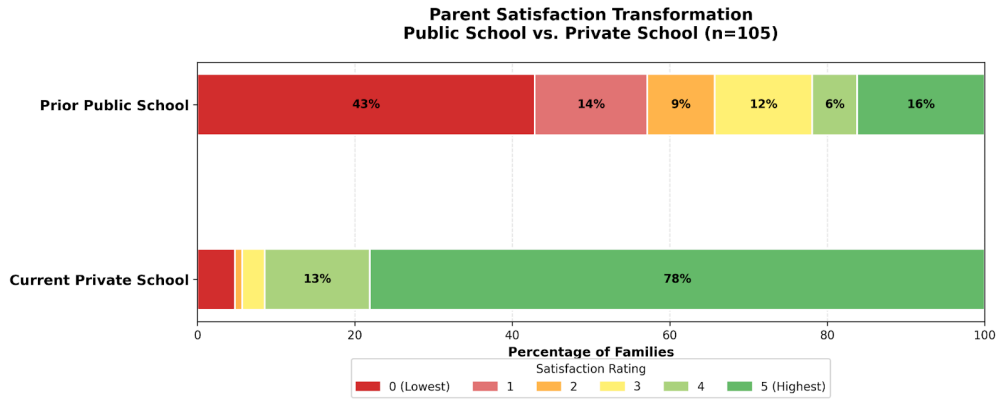


Figure 4.5 Parent Satisfaction Transformation Public School vs. Private School

Source: GATOR Parent Survey (2026)

Program Commitment Indicators:



- Would recommend GATOR to others: 99.0%
- Plan to continue participation: 99.0%
- Conduct improved since enrollment: 67.6%
- Academic progress "much better" or "better": 85.7%

4.6.1 National Research Context and Benchmarking

GATOR families' satisfaction levels align with, and actually exceed, national research findings on private school choice. A comprehensive review of school choice research

analyzing 203 empirical studies found that 83% produced positive effects, with parent satisfaction showing "the most consistently positive results" across all outcomes examined (EdChoice, 2025). The National Center for Education Statistics' 2016 Parent Survey found that 77% of private school parents reported being "very satisfied" with their child's school, compared to 60% of parents at chosen public schools and 54% at assigned public schools, with the same pattern evident across academic standards, discipline, and staff interactions (NCES, 2016).

4.6.2 GATOR Satisfaction Distribution and Comparative Interpretation

Among the 105 surveyed families, 78.1% rate their current private school at the highest satisfaction level (5 out of 5), while an additional 13.3% rate their school at 4 out of 5. This means 91.4% of families express high satisfaction with their current school experience; a remarkable endorsement that stands in stark contrast to their previous public school experiences, where 42.9% rated their satisfaction at 0 out of 5.

This dramatic shift in satisfaction cannot be attributed to any single factor but rather reflects the cumulative impact of the campus life elements documented throughout this pillar. Families appreciate the extracurricular opportunities that allow their children to develop talents and friendships. They value the parent involvement structures that give them voice and partnership in their children's education. They feel reassured by safe environments where behavioral issues are rare and quickly addressed. They connect with school communities that share their values and reinforce the character lessons they teach

at home. And they observe daily that their children are not just enrolled in schools but genuinely belong to communities where they are known, valued, and supported.

The following figure illustrates the distribution of parent satisfaction across three school sectors: assigned public schools, national private schools, and GATOR schools. The bell curves reveal not only differences in mean satisfaction levels (2.7 for public, 4.4 for private, 4.6 for GATOR) but also the tightness of the distributions. GATOR families cluster more consistently at the highest satisfaction levels, with less variance than either comparison group. This distribution pattern validates the findings from comprehensive research reviews: GATOR's 78.1% "very satisfied" rating exceeds even the strong 77% national private school average documented in NCES 2016 data, positioning GATOR at the far right tail of the satisfaction distribution (NCES, 2016).

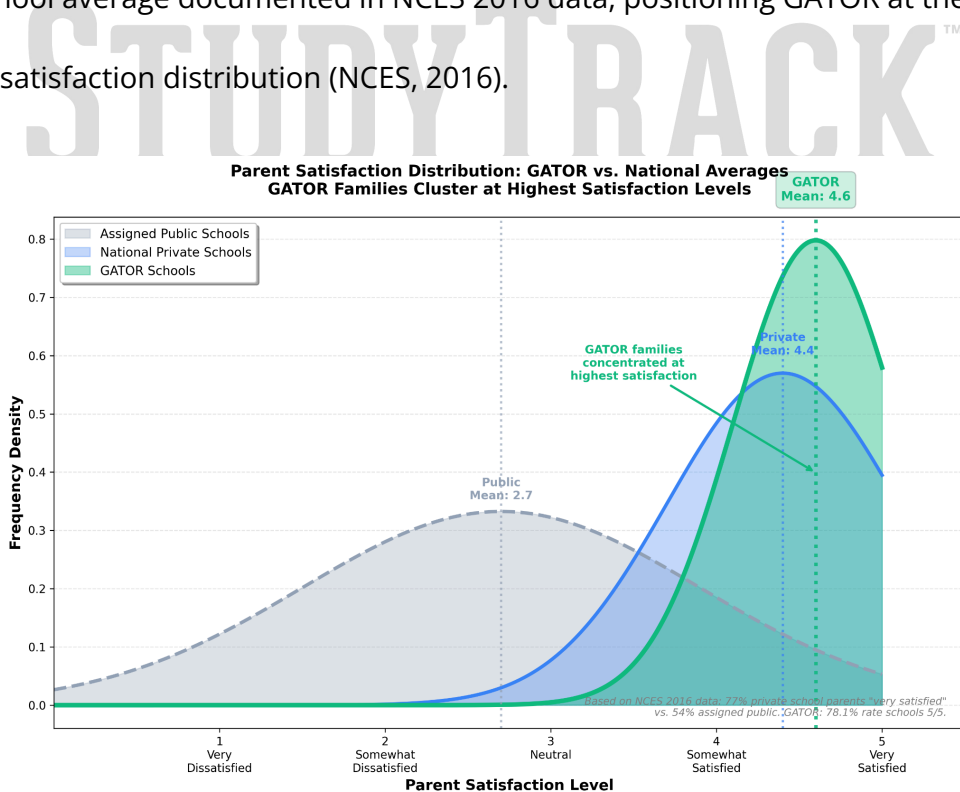


Figure 4.6 Parent Satisfaction Distribution: GATOR vs. National Averages. Source: Surveyed Private Schools (2026); Louisiana Department of Education (2024); National Center for Education Statistics (2016)

4.6.3 Open-Ended Responses and Community Experience

Parents consistently reference:

- Strong teacher relationships
- Balanced academics and extracurriculars
- Shared values
- Positive environment

Satisfaction appears cumulative, emerging from multiple campus life elements rather than a single factor.

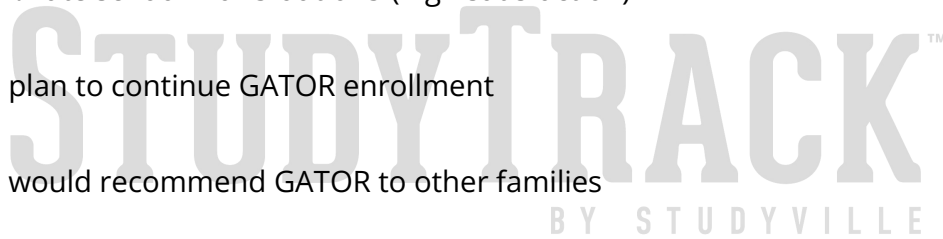
The open-ended survey responses provide texture to these satisfaction ratings. Families describe "wonderful school and environment," "excellent teaching and school support," "balance of academics and extracurricular activities in a structured environment," and "teacher and parent involved activities" as positive aspects of their GATOR experience. They appreciate being part of communities where teachers know their children's names, where administrators return phone calls promptly, where other families share similar commitments, and where their children come home excited about school rather than dreading the next day.

4.6.4 Retention and Recommendation as Loyalty Indicators

When asked whether they plan to continue using GATOR scholarships, 99% of families answered yes. When asked whether they would recommend GATOR to other families, 99% said they would. These intentions reflect more than satisfaction with campus life; they represent genuine loyalty to schools that have become central to their families' lives and their children's development.

Satisfaction and Retention Indicators:

- 78.1% rate current school 5 out of 5 (highest satisfaction)
- 91.4% rate school 4 or 5 out of 5 (high satisfaction)
- 99% plan to continue GATOR enrollment
- 99% would recommend GATOR to other families



4.7 The Parent Perspective: Community and Belonging

4.7.1 Qualitative Themes of Belonging and Relationship

The quantitative data on extracurricular programs, parent organizations, safety measures, and satisfaction ratings tells an important story, but the qualitative responses from parents reveal the human dimension of campus life that numbers cannot fully capture. When families describe the most positive aspects of the GATOR program, their responses

frequently emphasize community, belonging, relationships, and the intangible qualities that make a school feel like home.

Representative comments include: "Being able to place my children in a wonderful school and environment," "The teacher and parent involved activities. I love meeting other parents and teachers that share the same values as myself for my child," and "Allowed her to have a balance of academics and extracurricular activities in a structured environment." These responses reveal that families are not simply transacting for educational services but rather joining communities where they feel welcomed, valued, and connected to others who share their commitments.

See Appendix A for extended qualitative findings from participating parent focus groups on belonging, values alignment, and community connection. Appendix A offers de-identified testimony from three LA GATOR parent focus groups, providing valuable implementation insight into how participating families experience school choice, affordability, and school fit.

While qualitative and non-representative, these findings add meaningful context to the report's quantitative results.

4.7.2 Holistic Development and Structured Environment

The emphasis on "balance," "structured environment," and "wonderful school and environment" suggests that families appreciate the holistic nature of GATOR schools, institutions that attend not just to academic outcomes but to the full development of children as people. The mention of "values," "teacher and parent involved activities," and

"same values as myself" indicates that alignment of beliefs and partnership in mission matter deeply to families. And the recurring theme of being able to "place my children" or "put our children in a good school" reflects families' profound relief at having found educational environments they trust and believe in.

4.7.3 Campus Life as a Mechanism for Outcomes Across Pillars

This sense of community and belonging has tangible effects on student outcomes. Students who feel they belong to their school communities demonstrate higher attendance rates, better academic performance, more positive behavior, and greater persistence through challenges. The data from Pillars I, II, and III confirm these patterns: GATOR students achieve 97.5% graduation rates, 88.1% college enrollment rates, average ACT scores of 21, dramatically lower disciplinary incidents, and 85.7% parent-reported academic improvement. These outcomes do not occur in isolation from campus life; they emerge precisely because students are part of communities where they feel safe, supported, challenged, and valued.

4.7.4 Academic Progress Perception Shift

The figure here captures the transformation families describe when comparing their children's academic experience before and after GATOR enrollment. The distribution shift, from a mean performance perception of 45 (below satisfactory) at previous public schools to 75 (good to excellent) at current GATOR schools, represents more than statistical improvement. It reflects the lived experience of 105 families who report that 85.7% of their

children are performing better academically, with 67.6% describing the improvement as "much better." This visual illustrates the central finding of Pillar IV: GATOR schools are not merely providing alternative educational settings, but creating communities where students genuinely thrive.

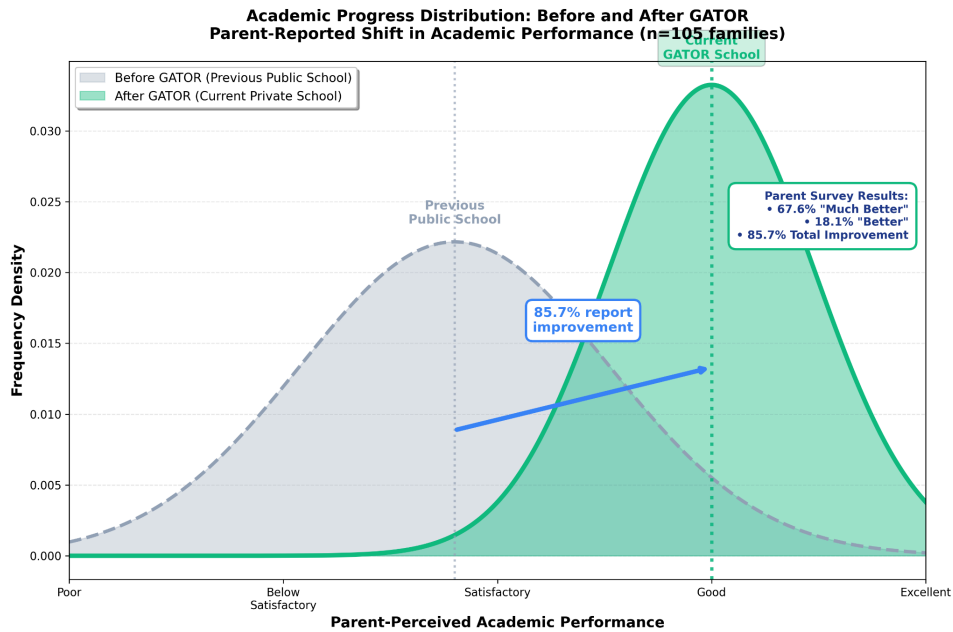


Figure 4.7 Academic Progress Distribution: Before and After GATOR. Source: Surveyed Private Schools (2026); Louisiana Department of Education (2024); National Center for Education Statistics (2016)

4.8 Interpreting Variation in Campus Life Models

4.8.1 Families Value More Than Academics

The data indicate families evaluate school quality holistically:

- Engagement
- Community

- Belonging
- Values alignment
- Parent partnership

High satisfaction and retention suggest these factors matter alongside academic outcomes. It is important to acknowledge that GATOR schools vary considerably in their approaches to campus life, just as they vary in size, grade configuration, religious affiliation, and educational philosophy. A small K-8 school with 100 students will necessarily offer fewer athletic teams than a high school with 500 students. A non-religious school will structure its values education differently than a Catholic school. A school in rural Louisiana will access different community resources than a school in Baton Rouge or New Orleans.

4.8.2 Variation as Program Strength Rather Than Weakness

GATOR schools vary in size, structure, religious affiliation, and extracurricular offerings. Families also differ in what they prioritize in campus life: some may place greater emphasis on competitive athletics, others on performing arts, service learning, or outdoor education. Preferences regarding parent organization structure, school size, and religious or secular orientation likewise differ across families.

The program framework allows families to select among schools with distinct campus life models rather than requiring a single uniform structure. As a result, participating schools reflect a range of approaches to extracurricular programming, parent involvement, and

school culture. The shared element across schools is not identical programming, but the presence of defined community structures shaped by each institution’s mission and context.

Educational quality encompasses more than test scores and graduation rates. Campus life is measured here through participation, involvement, reported wellbeing, and satisfaction—represents one dimension of the school experience that families report considering when evaluating their options within the GATOR program.

4.8.3 Interpreting Aggregate Statistics with Caution

Variation across schools means aggregate statistics should be interpreted carefully. For example, reporting that GATOR schools average 6.8 athletic programs reflects a mean across reporting institutions, but individual schools range from offering numerous teams to offering few or none. Such averages can obscure meaningful differences in size, grade configuration, mission, and resource capacity.

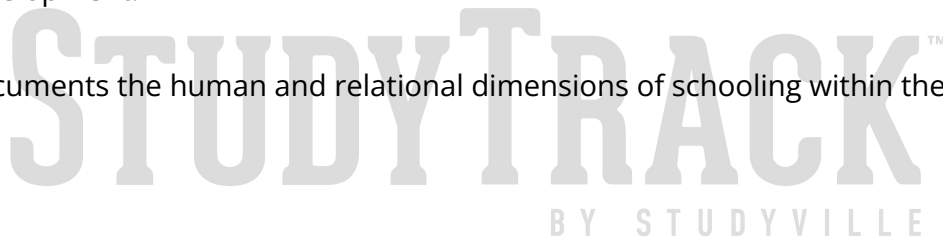
The relevant consideration is not whether every participating school provides identical programming, but whether the range of available options reflects the diversity of school models within the program.

4.9 Conclusion

4.9.1 Campus Life as the Human Dimension

The campus life data reinforces a central insight of school choice policy: families value much more than academic outcomes when selecting schools. They want communities where their children will be safe, engaged, challenged, and happy. They want environments that align with their values and reinforce the lessons they teach at home. They want schools where they feel welcomed as partners in their children's education. And they want their children to have opportunities, athletic, artistic, social, and personal, that support holistic development.

Pillar IV documents the human and relational dimensions of schooling within the GATOR program.



4.9.2 Public School Assignment and Community Fit Tensions

Traditional public school assignment by residential address necessarily creates schools that serve diverse populations with varied beliefs, priorities, and expectations. This diversity can be a strength, exposing children to different perspectives and building understanding across differences. But it can also create tensions when families fundamentally disagree about values, discipline, curriculum, and school culture. In large public schools, individual families often feel powerless to influence decisions and may struggle to find like-minded communities within the student body.

Through parental focus groups and surveys, our research consistently showed:

- High extracurricular participation despite fewer programs
- Active parent organizations and high homework engagement
- Strong values alignment across school communities
- Improved parent-reported social-emotional development
- High satisfaction (91.4% high ratings)
- Near-universal retention and recommendation intentions

4.9.3 Choice as Community Self-Selection

The GATOR program addresses these tensions by allowing families to self-select into school communities that match their values and priorities. Rather than forcing all families in a geographic area to accept a single school culture, the program enables families with similar commitments to choose schools together, creating coherent communities with shared missions. The result is what we see in the data: high satisfaction (91.4% rate schools 4 or 5 out of 5), strong retention (99% plan to continue), and enthusiastic recommendations (99% would recommend to others).

For policymakers evaluating whether to continue and expand the GATOR program, the campus life data matters because it reveals that educational quality encompasses more than test scores and graduation rates.

4.9.4 Research Context: Small Schools, Belonging, and Non-Cognitive

Gains

The academic opportunity data documented in Pillar III takes on additional significance when viewed through the lens of established education research. Tennessee's landmark Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project, which tracked over 7,000 students, found that students in small classes (13-17 students) significantly outperformed peers in larger classes (22-25 students) in both reading and mathematics, with benefits persisting into later grades. A comprehensive review of school size research showed that "students have a greater sense of belonging in small schools than in large ones" and that "interpersonal relations between and among students, teachers, and administrators are more positive" in smaller settings (Cotton, 1996). GATOR schools' average class size of 15.4 students falls squarely within the research-validated range shown to produce both academic and non-cognitive benefits, including improved student behavior, greater engagement in learning, and stronger sense of belonging.

4.9.5 Campus Life as an Essential Component of Educational Quality

While GATOR students do achieve strong academic outcomes (documented in Pillar I), families also value the vibrant campus life that makes school a place students want to be. The extracurricular programs, parent involvement opportunities, safe environments, values

alignment, and sense of community represent essential components of educational quality that justify continued public investment in school choice.

Campus life represents the human dimension of education: the relationships, activities, traditions, and daily experiences that transform schools from buildings where instruction happens into communities where students grow, learn, discover themselves, and build foundations for adult life. By this measure, GATOR schools are succeeding in creating vibrant campus environments that serve students and families well.

4.9.6 Summary of Observable Campus Life Strengths

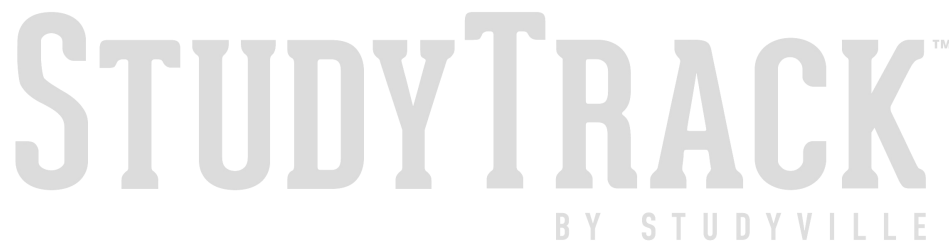
The data tell a consistent story: 171 athletic programs and 190 additional extracurricular activities provide students with diverse opportunities for growth beyond the classroom. Active parent organizations create pathways for family engagement and partnership in school life. Safety measures appropriate to each school's context ensure students can learn and play without fear. Religious identity and values alignment allow families to find schools that reinforce their deepest commitments. And satisfaction ratings of 91.4% reflect genuine appreciation for communities where families feel they belong.

4.9.7 Cross-Pillar Synthesis and Final Evaluation Finding

When combined with the strong academic outcomes documented in Pillar I, the safety advantages demonstrated in Pillar II, and the expanded opportunities described in Pillar III, the campus life data complete the picture of what the GATOR program provides: not just alternatives to assigned public schools, but genuine communities where students can

thrive academically, socially, emotionally, and personally. For the 1,300 students enrolled in responding schools, and the thousands more accessing GATOR scholarships across Louisiana, the program represents not just school choice, but the opportunity to be part of communities that parents trust, students enjoy, and families recommend to others.

The campus life data reinforce the central finding of this evaluation: Louisiana's GATOR program is working. It is creating positive school communities, producing high satisfaction among participating families, and demonstrating that school choice can deliver what families seek, not just academic instruction, but holistic environments where their children can grow into the people they hope they'll become.



PILLAR V: SUCCESS FACTORS

5.1 Overview and Analytical Scope

5.1.1 Pillar Framing and Definition of Success Factors

Pillar V examines structural and organizational conditions within participating schools that education research commonly associates with student outcomes.

Where Pillar I documents academic performance results and Pillar III documents academic access and advanced course availability, this pillar evaluates institutional conditions associated with instructional stability and student persistence. These include:

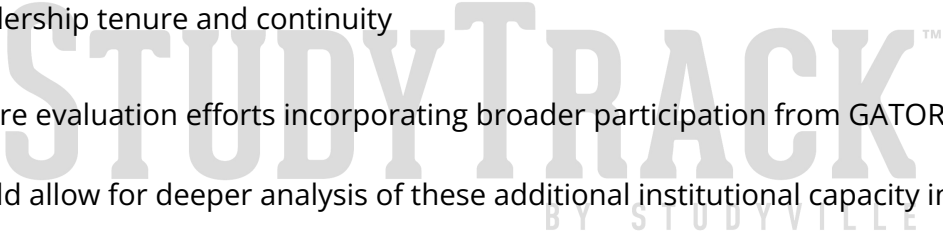
- Student-teacher ratios
- Average class size
- Teacher retention
- Attendance patterns
- Parent-school communication and engagement
- Graduation and postsecondary enrollment indicators
- Diploma rigor context

PILLAR V - SUCCESS FACTORS

The analysis draws from institutional reporting provided voluntarily by participating non-public GATOR schools, student records representing 1,300 enrolled students, and parent survey responses from 105 families.

Because institutional reporting participation was voluntary, certain structural capacity measures were not available for comprehensive analysis. These include:

- Administrative staffing metrics
- Financial stability indicators
- Years of institutional operation
- Leadership tenure and continuity
- Future evaluation efforts incorporating broader participation from GATOR schools would allow for deeper analysis of these additional institutional capacity indicators.



Pillar 5: Success Factors — GATOR Schools vs. Louisiana Public Schools

Success Factor	GATOR Schools	Louisiana Public Schools	Source
Truancy Rate	0.70% mean (63.6% of schools at 0%)	~3.0% statewide avg	Surveyed Private Schools; LDOE 2022-23
Chronic Absenteeism	6.3% of students	20.8% statewide	Student Records; LDOE 2022-23
Student-Teacher Ratio	13.6:1 mean (avg class size 15.4)	14:1 ratio; funded at 20-25:1	Surveyed Private Schools; NCES 2022
Teacher Retention	88.7% mean (94.1% schools at 80%+)	~85% statewide avg	Surveyed Private Schools; NCES 2022
Bullying Rate	0.32% mean (17 of 24 schools at 0%)	5.7% statewide	Surveyed Private Schools; LDOE 2022-23
Suspension Rate	0.62% mean	9.6% statewide	Surveyed Private Schools; LDOE 2022-23
Parental Involvement	85.7% attended 1+ PTC; 92.4% weekly HW help	Lower rates among low-income families	Parent Survey; NCES 2019

Data coverage note: Institutional data reflects reporting subset of 190 participating schools.

Figure 5.1 Success Factors – GATOR Schools vs. Louisiana Public Schools

5.1.2 Family Demographic Profile of Reporting Sample

Survey respondents provide insight into the demographic characteristics of families participating in the reporting sample.

Among 105 responding families:

- 63.8% qualify as economically disadvantaged through participation in SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid.
- 44.7% report household incomes between \$25,000 and \$49,999 annually.
- 10.5% report household incomes below \$10,000 annually.
- 55.2% report household incomes below \$50,000 annually.
- 53.3% report residing in single-parent households.

For context, Louisiana's statewide single-parent household rate is approximately 35%, indicating a higher concentration within the reporting sample.

Parent education levels vary:

- 33.4% hold a bachelor's or graduate degree.
- 47.6% report a high school diploma or less.
- 20.0% report some college without degree completion.

Additionally, 92.4% report helping their child with homework weekly, indicating sustained parental engagement within the reporting sample.

These demographic characteristics provide context for interpreting academic, engagement, and satisfaction findings throughout this evaluation. They describe the population represented in the survey responses and do not imply statewide demographic distribution among all GATOR participants.

5.1.3 Parent Engagement and School Connection

Survey data provides insight into parent engagement within the reporting sample.

Among responding families:

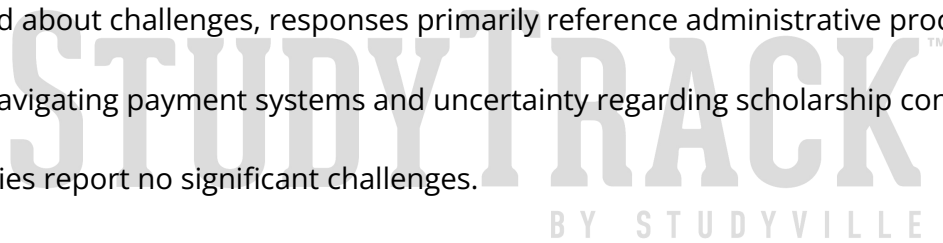
- 92.4% report helping their children with homework weekly.
- Mean reported parent-teacher conferences: 0.8 annually.
- 100% cite academics as a primary reason for applying to the program.

These figures describe levels of self-reported parental involvement among participating families.

Qualitative responses highlight several recurring themes. Families frequently reference:

- Educational choice
- School environment quality
- Values alignment
- Teacher engagement

When asked about challenges, responses primarily reference administrative processes, including navigating payment systems and uncertainty regarding scholarship continuity. Many families report no significant challenges.



These engagement indicators provide contextual information regarding family involvement and school connection within the reporting sample. As with other survey-based findings, results reflect voluntary participation and are presented descriptively.

5.2 Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism

5.2.1 Why Truancy Matters for Academic Outcomes

Truancy, the pattern of unexcused student absences, is one of the most consistently documented predictors of academic underperformance. Research has found that students who are frequently absent in elementary grades are significantly less likely to read proficiently by third grade, and those absent frequently in middle and high school face substantially elevated dropout risk (Chang & Romero, 2008; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Understanding how GATOR schools perform on this measure therefore provides meaningful context for the academic outcomes documented in Pillar I.

5.2.2 School-Reported Truancy and Attendance

Among surveyed private schools reporting valid truancy data, 63.6% reported a truancy rate of 0.0% (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026). The mean truancy rate across the reporting schools was 0.70% and the median was 0.00%. The highest individual school rate among valid responses was 10.0%, with the majority of remaining schools reporting rates at or below 2.0%.

The figure below compares the distribution of chronic absenteeism rates (left) and suspension rates (right) between GATOR schools and Louisiana public schools. GATOR students cluster at a 6.3% chronic absenteeism, 14.5 percentage points below the statewide public school rate of 20.8%, while the suspension rate distribution of 0.62% is

numerically lower than the reported statewide public school rate of 9.6%, reflecting the low-incident peer environments documented in sections 5.2 and 5.6 (Louisiana Department of Education, 2023).

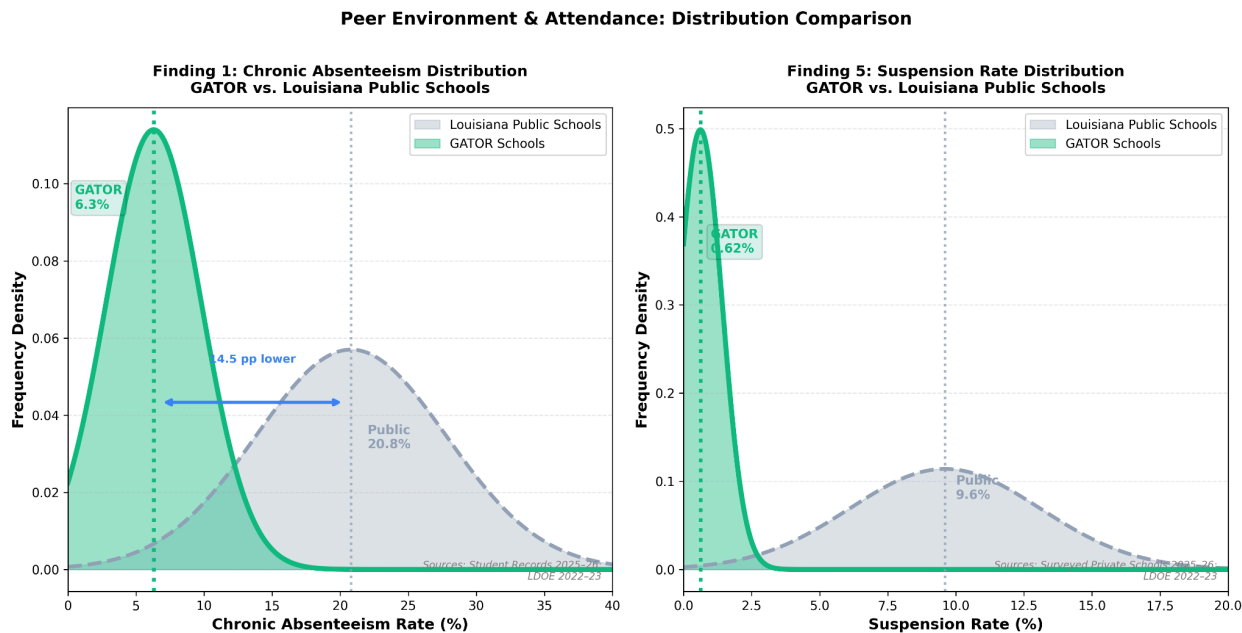


Figure 5.2 Peer Environment & Attendance: Distribution Comparison. Source: Surveyed Private Schools (2026); Louisiana Department of Education (2023)

These data reflect variation across students and schools and should be interpreted within the limits of partial reporting.

5.2.3 Student-Level Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism

The parent survey data are consistent with the institutional figures. Among all 105 responding families, 100% reported that their child had not been involved in any truancy incident during the current academic year, and 100% reported that their child did not

experience chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more of available school days (Parent Survey, 2025–2026). Student records corroborate this pattern within the reporting subset: of the 571 students for whom chronic absenteeism data were recorded, 93.7% were identified as not chronically absent and 6.3% were identified as chronically absent (Student Records, 2025–2026). Attendance rate data available for 579 students showed a median attendance rate of 95.0%. The reported mean of 73.0% reflects incomplete or partial attendance records for a subset of students and should not be interpreted as a representative attendance rate across reporting schools.

5.2.4 Public Benchmark Context and Interpretation

For context, Louisiana's statewide chronic absenteeism rate in public schools was 20.8% in 2022–2023, per the Louisiana Department of Education. The 6.3% chronic absenteeism rate observed within the student records reporting subset represents a substantially lower rate by comparison. The parent survey's 0% self-reported chronic absenteeism should be interpreted with caution given self-reporting considerations, but it is directionally consistent with the institutional data.

Truancy and Attendance Data:

- 63.6% of reporting schools recorded a 0.0% truancy rate (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026)
- Mean school truancy rate: 0.70%; Median: 0.00% (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026)

- 93.7% of students with recorded data were not chronically absent (Student Records, 2025–2026)
- 100% of responding families reported zero truancy incidents (Parent Survey, 2025–2026)
- Louisiana public school chronic absenteeism rate: 20.8% (LDOE, 2022–2023)

Note: Parent-reported absenteeism data (100% reporting no chronic absenteeism) should be interpreted cautiously given self-report limitations. Attendance fields were incomplete for portions of the 1,300-student dataset and further participation from non-public schools is needed to accurately calculate.

5.3 Student-Teacher Ratios in Reporting Schools

5.3.1 Instructional Group Size

Instructional group size is commonly studied in education research as a structural factor associated with classroom dynamics and individualized instruction. Smaller ratios allow teachers to provide more individualized instruction, address diverse learning needs more effectively, and develop stronger relationships with students, effects documented most rigorously in Tennessee's landmark Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project, which tracked over 7,000 students and found significant academic benefits for students in classes of 13 to 17 compared to those in classes of 22 to 25 (Finn & Achilles, 1990; Krueger, 1999).

5.3.2 School-Reported Ratios and Class Sizes

Among the 190 surveyed private schools that provided parseable student-teacher ratio data, the mean ratio was 12.5 students per teacher and the median was 12.0 students per teacher, with individual school ratios ranging from 6:1 to 25:1 (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026). Average class size data, available for the reporting schools, showed a mean of 15.4 students per class and a median of 16.0, ranging from 6 to 21 students (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026).

The figure below illustrates the distribution of teacher retention rates (left) and average class sizes (right) among reporting GATOR schools compared to Louisiana public school benchmarks. The retention distribution centers at 88.7%, with 94.1% of reporting schools falling within the strong retention zone of 80% or above (Surveyed Private Schools, 2026). The class size distribution centers at 15.4 students, 5.6 students fewer than the public school average, and falls within the 13–17 student range that is identified as the threshold for meaningful instructional benefit by the Tennessee STAR project.

Instructional Conditions: Teacher Retention & Class Size

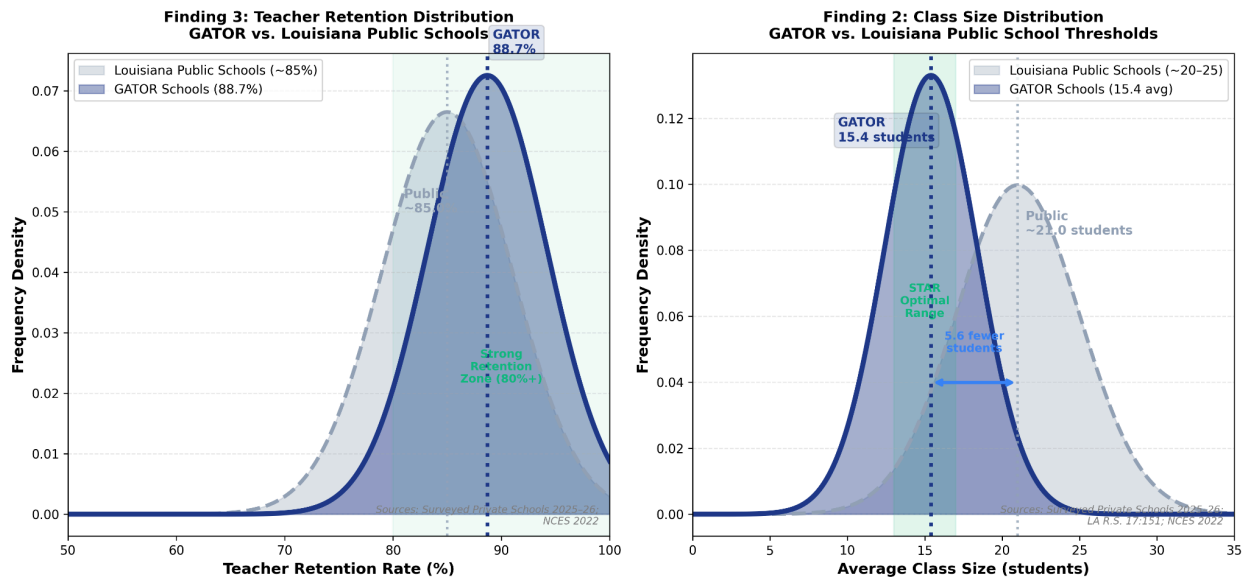


Figure 5.3 Instructional Conditions: Teacher Retention & Class Size. Source: Surveyed Private Schools (2026); Louisiana Department of Education (2023)

5.3.3 Public School Funding Thresholds and Comparison

Louisiana’s public school funding formula, established under Louisiana Revised Statute 17:151, structures funded staffing ratios at **20:1 for grades K-3** and **25:1 for grades 4-6**.

These ratios reflect formula allocations rather than guaranteed classroom-level caps and may not directly correspond to actual class sizes in individual public schools.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has reported a statewide Louisiana student-teacher ratio of approximately **14:1**; however, this figure reflects total instructional staff divided by total enrollment and does not equate to average classroom size.

Student-teacher ratios and class sizes are distinct measures and are not directly interchangeable.

Among reporting GATOR-participating schools, the mean student-teacher ratio was **12.5:1**, and the mean reported class size was **15.4 students**. These figures are numerically below the statutory funding benchmarks noted above. However, comparisons should be interpreted cautiously given structural differences in reporting methods, staffing definitions, and grade configurations across sectors.

Nationally, NCES data have historically shown that private schools, on average, report smaller student-teacher ratios and class sizes than public schools. The figures reported by participating GATOR schools are generally consistent with that broader national pattern for non-public education, though the limited sample size in this study prevents definitive conclusions.



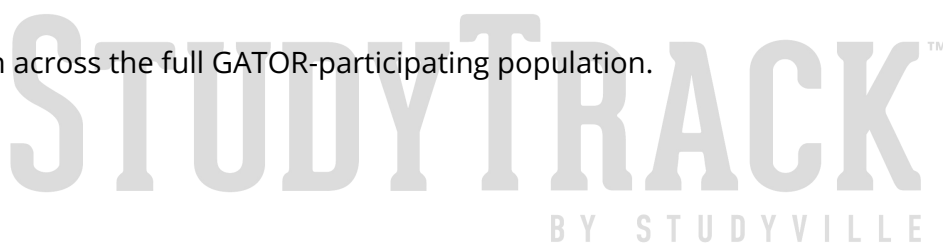
5.3.4 Student-Teacher Ratio Data

- Mean student-teacher ratio: 12.5:1; Median: 12.0:1 (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026)
- Mean average class size: 15.4 students; Median: 16.0 (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026)
- Louisiana statutory public school ratio: 20:1 (K–3) and 25:1 (grades 4–6) (LA R.S. 17:151)
- Data parseable for 21 of 190 participating schools

Ratio data were available for **21 of the 190 participating schools**. Because institutional data submission by non-public participating GATOR schools was voluntary, coverage is limited and does not represent a complete census of all schools in the program.

Given the limited number of reporting schools and differences in how ratios are calculated across sectors, these findings should be interpreted as descriptive of the reporting subset rather than representative of all participating schools.

While the available data suggest that participating non-public schools may operate with smaller instructional group sizes, consistent with broader national trends in private education, more comprehensive and standardized reporting would be required to confirm this pattern across the full GATOR-participating population.



5.4 Teacher Retention Rates Are High Among Reporting Schools

5.4.1 The Significance of Teacher Retention

Teacher turnover affects instructional stability, weakens the student-teacher relationships that support learning, and is disproportionately associated with schools serving economically disadvantaged populations (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2013). Conversely, high teacher retention is associated with accumulated institutional knowledge, greater instructional consistency across grade levels, and stronger academic outcomes over time.

Understanding retention within GATOR schools is therefore relevant to evaluating whether students benefit from stable, experienced instructional environments.

5.4.2 School-Reported Retention Rates

Among reporting schools:

- Mean teacher retention rate: 88.7%
- Median: 90.0%
- 94.1% of reporting schools retained 80% or more of faculty
- Two schools reported 100% retention

Retention data were not available for all participating GATOR schools.

5.4.3 Certification and Staffing Variation

Teacher certification data were available for 12 surveyed schools and showed a mean certification rate of 74.9% and a median of 82.5%, with individual school rates ranging from as low as 3% to 100% (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026). This variation reflects the staffing flexibility characteristic of private schools, which are not required to hire only state-certified teachers and may instead employ subject-matter experts, professionals with domain expertise, or educators with alternative credentials. Research on the relationship between teacher certification and student outcomes in private school settings has found that subject-matter expertise and instructional quality are not always correlated with

formal state certification status (Hanushek, 2011), which contextualizes the variation in this data without minimizing it.

5.5 Parent-School Communication and Engagement

5.5.1 Parent Involvement as a Success Factor

Parental involvement is among the most replicated success factors in educational research. Meta-analyses spanning multiple decades have found consistent associations between parent engagement and improved student academic performance, higher attendance, stronger social-emotional development, and reduced dropout risk, with effects observed across income levels and school types (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2012). The GATOR program's demographic profile, 63.8% economically disadvantaged, 53.3% single-parent households, makes the parental involvement data particularly notable, as these are populations for whom sustained school engagement is often more difficult to maintain.

5.5.2 Conference Attendance and At-Home Support

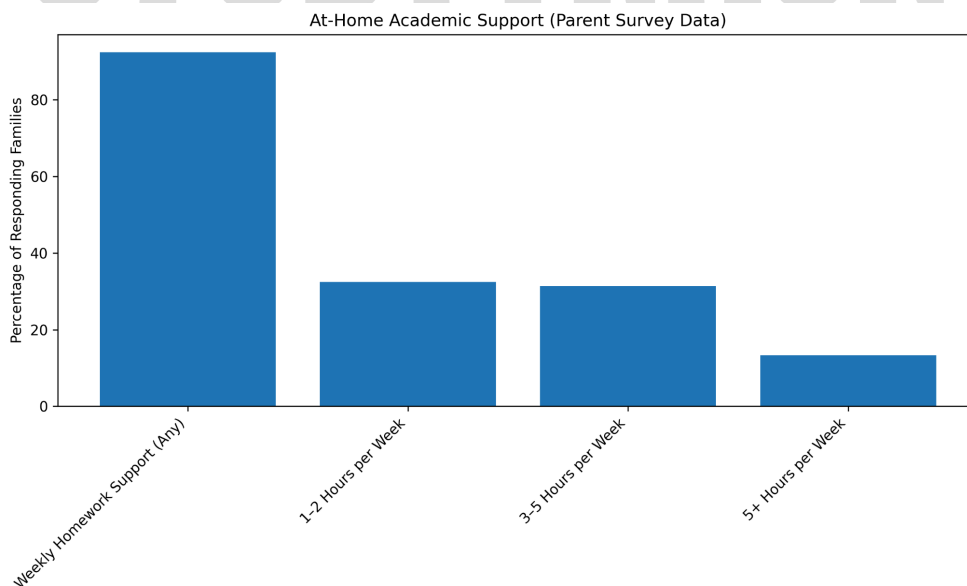
Among 105 responding families:

- 85.7% attended at least one parent-teacher conference
- 36.2% attended two to three
- 4.8% attended four or more
- 14.3% attended none

PILLAR V - SUCCESS FACTORS

National data indicate that parent-teacher conference attendance rates among economically disadvantaged families in public schools are substantially lower than national averages (NCES, 2019), providing a baseline against which the GATOR figures can be contextualized.

At-home academic engagement was similarly documented. Among 105 responding families, 92.4% reported helping their children with homework on a weekly basis (Parent Survey, 2025–2026). Of those families, 32.4% reported spending one to two hours per week, 31.4% reported three to five hours, and 13.3% reported five or more hours per week. Institutional data corroborate structured school-level parent engagement: surveyed private schools reported a total of 38 active parent organizations across just 25 reporting schools, averaging 1.5 organizations per school (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026).



5.5.3 School-Level Parent Organizations and Community Formation

Community formation among GATOR families extends beyond individual school settings. Of 105 responding families, 63.5% reported knowing other GATOR scholarship families, indicating that the program is generating peer networks among participating households (Parent Survey, 2025–2026). Additionally, 67.6% expressed willingness to participate in a parent focus group to support the program's future development, suggesting engagement that extends beyond individual family interest to a sense of investment in the program as a whole. These figures reflect a parent population that is not passively receiving a benefit but actively participating in the educational communities their children attend.

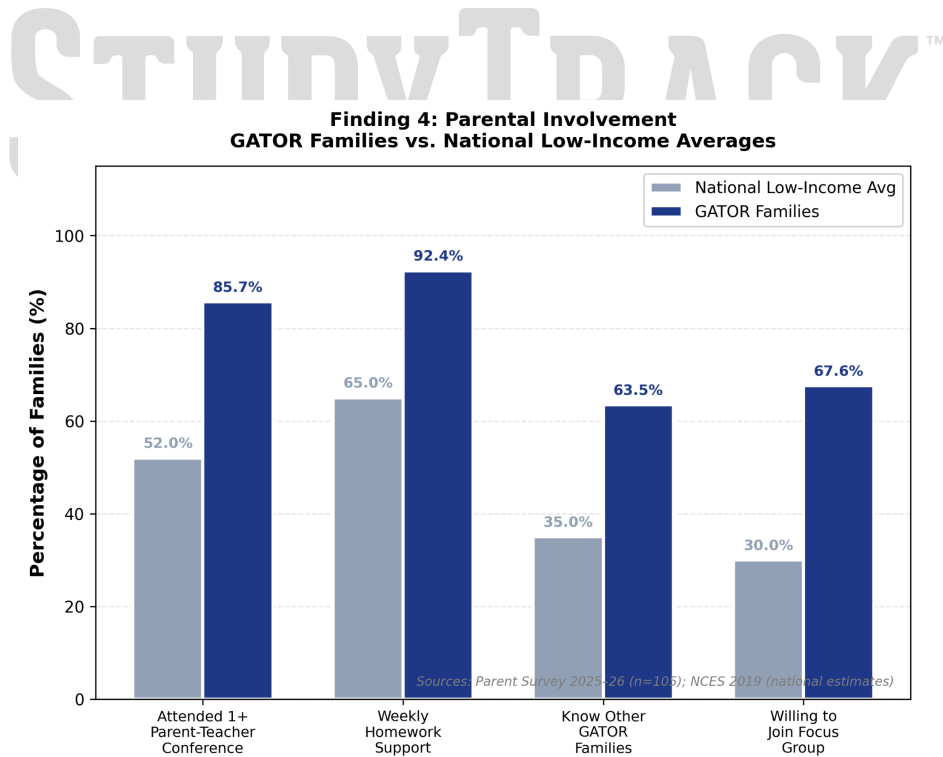


Figure 5.4 Parental Involvement: GATOR Families vs. National Low-Income Averages. Source: Surveyed Private Schools (2026); Louisiana Department of Education (2023)

5.5.4 Benchmark Context and Interpretation

The above figure benchmarks four parental engagement measures, conference attendance, weekly homework support, peer network formation, and program investment, against national low-income averages. Among responding families, reported engagement levels exceed national low-income benchmarks across the measured indicators. Because survey participation was voluntary and represents a subset of enrolled families, these findings may not reflect the full GATOR population.

Parental Involvement Data:

- 85.7% attended at least one parent-teacher conference this year (Parent Survey, 2025–2026)
- 92.4% provide weekly homework support (Parent Survey, 2025–2026)
- 38 active parent organizations across 25 reporting schools (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026)
- 63.5% know other GATOR scholarship families (Parent Survey, 2025–2026)
- 67.6% willing to participate in a program focus group (Parent Survey, 2025–2026)

5.6 Peer Environment and Student Engagement Patterns

5.6.1 Peer Effects as a Structural Variable

Peer environments influence student behavior, engagement, and academic norms.

Research indicates that the behavioral composition of a student body can shape classroom climate, expectations, and participation patterns.

Within this evaluation, peer effects are examined using available indicators including disciplinary incidence rates, attendance clustering, extracurricular participation, and bullying prevalence.

Bullying rates reported by participating schools were low within the reporting subset (mean 0.32%). While the detailed safety analysis and cross-sector benchmarking appear in Pillar II, the relatively low incidence of reported bullying is relevant here as a peer-environment variable. Lower levels of peer victimization can contribute to classroom stability, student participation, and continuity of engagement.

These indicators are presented as contextual variables influencing peer dynamics, with full safety-specific analysis addressed separately in Pillar II.

5.6.2 Behavioral Incidence as Peer Climate

Among 190 surveyed private schools reporting bullying data, the mean bullying incident rate was 0.32% and the median was 0.00% (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026).

Seventeen of the reporting schools recorded zero bullying incidents. Suspension data from 18 reporting schools showed a mean rate of 0.62% and a median of 0.01% (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026). By comparison, the Louisiana Department of Education reported statewide public school suspension and bullying rates of approximately 9.6% and 5.7% respectively for 2022–2023. Among the 1,300 students in the student records dataset for whom disciplinary incident data were available, 93.1% had zero recorded incidents during the current academic year (Student Records, 2025–2026).

5.6.3 Parent-Reported Conduct and Behavioral Change

Parent survey data reinforce the behavioral picture. All 105 responding families reported zero suspensions and zero truancy incidents for their children during the current year (Parent Survey, 2025–2026). Regarding conduct more broadly, 67.6% of responding families reported their child's conduct had improved since enrolling in the private school, 24.8% were unsure, and 7.6% reported no improvement (Parent Survey, 2025–2026).

5.6.4 Extracurricular Participation as a Peer Environment Indicator

Extracurricular participation constitutes a peer environment factor in that schools with higher participation rates tend to foster broader social integration, reduce social

stratification, and increase students' sense of belonging to their school community (Barker & Gump, 1964; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). Among the 1,300 students in the student records dataset with extracurricular data, 52.1% participated in at least one activity and 31.4% participated in two or more (Student Records, 2025–2026). Parent survey data showed 69.5% of responding families' children participating in extracurricular activities, with 53.3% reporting increased involvement since enrolling (Parent Survey, 2025–2026).

5.6.5 Student Composition and ESA Share Context

The enrolled student population across 26 schools in the student records dataset was 55.5% Black or African American, 37.2% White, and 4.2% Hispanic, with the remaining 3.1% identifying as two or more races or other categories (Student Records, 2025–2026). ESA participation as a share of total school enrollment varied considerably across reporting schools, with a mean of 10.9% and a median of 0.4%, indicating that in most schools GATOR students constitute a small share of the broader student body and are therefore integrated into peer environments that extend beyond the scholarship population (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026).

5.6.6 Peer Environment Data

- Mean bullying rate: 0.32%; (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026)
- Mean suspension rate: 0.62%; Median: 0.01% (Surveyed Private Schools, 2025–2026)

- Louisiana public school suspension rate: ~9.6%; bullying rate: ~5.7% (LDOE, 2022–2023)
- 93.1% of students with recorded data had zero disciplinary incidents (Student Records, 2025–2026)
- 67.6% of responding families report improved student conduct (Parent Survey, 2025–2026)
- 69.5% of students participate in extracurricular activities (Parent Survey, 2025–2026)

5.7 Diploma Strength and Post-Secondary Credential Context

5.7.1 Louisiana Strength of Diploma Framework

Louisiana’s accountability system includes a Strength of Diploma Index that differentiates public high schools based on documented postsecondary readiness measures earned by graduating students. Under this framework, students receive a baseline value for earning a standard high school diploma. Additional accountability weight is awarded when graduates complete recognized readiness measures, such as passing Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or CLEP examinations, completing dual enrollment coursework, or earning other state-recognized readiness credentials.

Each school's Strength of Diploma score is calculated by averaging the readiness-weighted index points earned across all students in its graduating cohort. This structure allows the state to distinguish schools not only by graduation rate, but also by the level of documented preparation demonstrated by graduates.

Schools earning higher index values generally reflect higher participation and success in advanced coursework and dual enrollment opportunities. Education research commonly associates these readiness measures with stronger postsecondary enrollment outcomes and higher college-readiness indicators, including ACT performance.

Louisiana public schools report these index scores annually through the state accountability system using standardized definitions and reporting requirements.

5.7.2 GATOR Participating Non-Public School Context

Participating GATOR non-public schools are not evaluated under Louisiana's accountability framework and do not submit standardized readiness data to the state under the Strength of Diploma methodology. As a result, a direct Strength of Diploma Index comparison cannot be calculated using currently available data.

Instead, available indicators from reporting GATOR schools provide descriptive evidence of postsecondary preparation within the participating non-public sector. Among the reporting subset:

- Graduation rate: 97.5%
- College enrollment rate: 88.1%
- Average ACT composite score: 21
- AP course offerings: Documented at multiple reporting high schools

While AP course availability does not equate to AP examination passage — which is required to earn additional index points under Louisiana’s Strength of Diploma framework — the presence of advanced coursework indicates access to college-level academic pathways in participating schools.

ACT performance provides an additional independent indicator of academic readiness and postsecondary eligibility, as it is used for scholarship qualification and college admission benchmarks within Louisiana.

Because readiness measures are not reported using Louisiana’s index definitions, this report presents graduation, enrollment, ACT performance, and AP availability descriptively rather than as a weighted diploma-strength score.

5.7.3 Comparative Interpretation

Louisiana's Strength of Diploma Index differentiates public schools based on documented readiness measures such as AP passage and dual enrollment completion. Schools earning more advanced readiness points typically demonstrate higher participation and success in these academic activities. Research literature commonly associates these readiness indicators with higher rates of postsecondary enrollment and stronger standardized test outcomes.

For GATOR participating non-public schools, standardized readiness-weighted index data are not available. However, the reported graduation rate (97.5%), college enrollment rate (88.1%), and average ACT composite score (21) provide observable outcome indicators associated with postsecondary transition and academic preparation.

Accordingly, comparisons in this report focus on observable readiness outcomes rather than on a formal diploma-strength index score.

5.7.4 Requirements for an Aligned Comparison

A fully aligned comparison between Louisiana public schools' Strength of Diploma Index scores and participating GATOR non-public schools would require standardized reporting of readiness measures using definitions consistent with the Louisiana Department of Education's accountability framework.

Specifically, the following data elements would need to be collected at the student level for each graduating cohort:

- Cohort graduation status under the state's four-year cohort methodology
- AP, IB, or CLEP examination passage rates (not course enrollment alone)
- Dual enrollment course completion and credit attainment
- Other readiness measures recognized under the state's Strength of Diploma Index formula
- Cohort size and graduation verification

In addition, comparability would require application of the same point weights and averaging methodology used in Louisiana's public accountability system.

Because participating GATOR non-public schools are not currently required to submit these standardized readiness measures, available data support descriptive reporting but do not permit calculation of a comparable diploma-strength index score.

Future evaluation efforts could incorporate standardized readiness reporting protocols if direct comparability with Louisiana's accountability framework becomes a policy objective.

5.8 Data Limitations

5.8.1 Coverage and Parsing Limitations

Several data limitations bear explicit acknowledgment across all findings. Student-teacher ratio data were available only from schools that voluntarily submitted institutional reporting.

5.8.2 Parent Survey Response Limitations

Parent survey responses represent 105 families, approximately 8% of the total enrolled student population of 1,300. Families who completed the survey may differ from non-respondents in ways the data cannot capture, including in their levels of engagement and awareness of their child's school performance.

5.8.3 Student Records Completeness Limitation

Student records fields for attendance, chronic absenteeism, disciplinary incidents, and extracurricular participation are available for subsets of the 1,300 enrolled students ranging from 7.8% to 69.6%. Findings from these subsets carry the limitations inherent in incomplete administrative data collection, and should be interpreted accordingly.

5.8.4 Voluntary Participation and Structural Reporting Constraints

Participation in this evaluation was voluntary. As a result, schools choosing to report data may differ systematically from those that did not participate. This introduces potential selection effects that limit statewide generalizability.

The absence of required reporting for ESA-participating schools in Louisiana prevents comprehensive sector-wide analysis. Without required data submission aligned to unified definitions, cross-sector comparison remains incomplete.

This limitation reflects structural policy design rather than analytic omission. The findings herein should therefore be interpreted as descriptive baseline observations within a voluntary reporting framework.

5.9 Cross-Finding Synthesis and Summary

5.9.1 Summary of Conditions Associated with Positive Outcomes

Across the five success factors examined in this pillar, data from surveyed private schools, student records, and parent surveys consistently describe conditions that educational research associates with positive student outcomes. Truancy rates are low relative to Louisiana public school benchmarks. Student-teacher ratios among reporting schools average 12.5:1, below state-funded public school thresholds. Teacher retention averages 88.7% among reporting schools, with nearly all retaining the majority of their faculty.

Parental involvement was measured through conference attendance, at-home academic support, and community participation and was documented at relatively high rates, particularly given the economic profile of the participating population. Peer environment indicators, including bullying rates, suspension rates, and disciplinary incident rates, are consistently low across reporting schools.

The available reporting indicates that these conditions are present within the reporting subset of participating schools. Comprehensive evaluation of their strength and distribution across all 190 participating schools may require more complete and standardized data collection from participating institutions across a full school year.



COST COMPARISON OF LA GATOR AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

6.1 Overview and Analytical Scope

6.1.1 Fiscal Question and Outcome Context

The preceding five pillars establish that GATOR schools achieve 97.5% graduation rates, 88.1% college enrollment, 95% lower safety incidents, and 99% parent satisfaction. This cost analysis examines the fiscal investment required to achieve these outcomes and compares GATOR ESA awards to Louisiana public school funding structures.

Louisiana's Minimum Foundation Program allocates \$9,568 per student (\$5,534 state + \$4,034 local) for public education in the 50 parishes where GATOR operates. GATOR scholarships average \$7,220 per student according to Louisiana Department of Education data. This represents a per-student allocation difference of \$2,348, or 24.5% lower public cost for GATOR participants compared to traditional public school MFP funding.

Public schools in these parishes spend \$17,778 per student in total expenditure when including federal funds, capital costs, and district services beyond state and local allocation.

Private schools typically supplement the \$7,220 ESA award through tuition contributions, fundraising, and endowments when needed.

6.1.2 Data Sources and Study Coverage

This analysis examines whether this cost differential corresponds to differences in educational outcomes across graduation rates, college enrollment, student-teacher ratios, classroom environments, and parent-reported satisfaction. The analysis draws on three data sources: Louisiana Department of Education per-pupil expenditure data for all public schools, institutional surveys from 27 GATOR-participating private schools serving 1,300 students, and parent survey responses from 105 GATOR families.

6.2 Primary Fiscal Framework: Allocation Comparison

6.2.1 Why Allocation is the Primary Policy Comparison

Comparing Louisiana public school costs to GATOR ESA awards requires distinguishing between two different measures: what the state allocates to educate students versus what school systems actually spend. These represent different policy questions with different fiscal implications. Following guidance from the Louisiana Department of Education, this evaluation uses allocation as the primary comparison framework while providing expenditure data as additional context.

6.2.2 Louisiana MFP Allocation vs. GATOR ESA Allocation

Louisiana's Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) allocates \$9,568 per student in state and local funds for public education. This figure combines \$5,534 in state allocation and \$4,034 in local allocation - the formula funding designed to cover basic educational services across Louisiana's public schools. GATOR ESA awards average \$7,220 per student according to Louisiana Department of Education data for the 2025-26 academic year, representing 5,546 awards totaling \$40,042,120 (Louisiana Department of Education, 2025).

The allocation comparison yields a difference of \$2,348 per student, or 24.5% lower public cost for GATOR participants compared to traditional public school attendance. This represents the most direct answer to the policy question: *How much does the state allocate per student in each sector?*



6.2.3 Parent-Reported ESA Award vs. Official Program Data

Parent survey data from 105 GATOR families reported an average ESA award of \$6,290, slightly lower than the official LDOE figure. This difference likely reflects response timing (older award amounts) or incomplete reporting among survey respondents. For consistency with official program data and LDOE guidance, this evaluation uses the \$7,220 figure throughout the fiscal analysis.

6.2.4 Fiscal Impact Using Allocation Comparison

At current analyzed enrollment of 1,300 students, GATOR generates measurable fiscal impact to state and local allocations:

Enrollment Scenario	Public MFP Allocation	GATOR ESA Allocation	Annual Savings
Current Analyzed Enrollment (1,300 students)	\$11.8 million	\$9.4 million	\$2.4 million
Total Program Enrollment (5,546 students)	\$50.3 million	\$40.0 million	\$10.2 million

Figure 6.1 Current Analyzed Enrollment vs. Total Program Enrollment.

Source: Louisiana Department of Education, MFP Allocation Data (2024); LDOE GATOR FAQ (2025) Authors' calculations based on Louisiana Department of Education (2024, 2025)

6.2.5 Projected Expansion Scenarios:

If Louisiana expanded GATOR to serve 40,000 students (approximately the size of the initial application pool):

Enrollment Scenario	Public MFP Allocation	GATOR ESA Allocation	Annual Savings	10-Year Cumulative
Projected Expansion (40,000 students)	\$362.7 million	\$288.8 million	\$73.9 million	\$739 million

Figure 6.2 Projected Expansion Enrollment Scenario.

Source: Authors' calculations based on Louisiana Department of Education (2024, 2025)
 These projections assume static per-pupil allocation amounts and do not account for potential changes in MFP formula, federal funding shifts, or program administration costs. The savings represent reduced state and local allocation requirements, though actual fiscal

impact depends on how public school systems adjust operations when enrollment declines.

6.3 Supporting Context: Expenditure Comparison and Financial Models

6.3.1 Expenditure as a Distinct Fiscal Question

Total expenditure per student tells a different story than allocation, reflecting the comprehensive cost of education when including all revenue sources and spending categories. Public schools in the 50 parishes where GATOR operates spent an average of \$17,778 per student in total expenditure (Louisiana Department of Education, 2024) This figure substantially exceeds the \$9,568 MFP allocation because it includes the gap between allocation and expenditure reflecting four major categories. Federal funding provides Title I grants for economically disadvantaged students, IDEA special education funding, school meal programs, and categorical federal grants. Capital expenditures cover facility construction and renovation, transportation infrastructure including buses and maintenance, technology equipment and systems, and building operations. District-level services include special education evaluation and support, central administration, professional development, and student support services such as counseling, nursing, and social work. Debt service obligations address bond payments for school construction and long-term facility financing that continue regardless of enrollment changes.

The \$17,778 figure represents what Louisiana spends per student across all funding sources, not what the state may allocate through its formula funding mechanism.

6.3.2 Different Financial Models in Public vs. Private Schools

The allocation versus expenditure distinction becomes particularly important when comparing public and private school finances because these sectors operate under fundamentally different financial models.

Public schools receive funding exclusively from public sources (state allocation, local allocation, federal grants) and spend public dollars on comprehensive services including facilities, transportation, food service, and specialized student support. The \$17,778 total expenditure reflects the full cost of operating a public school system.

Private schools participating in GATOR receive \$7,220 in public ESA funds per student, but their total operating budgets include private revenue sources unavailable to public schools:

- **Additional tuition payments** - Families contribute beyond the ESA award (parent survey data shows an average of \$1,795 in out-of-pocket contributions among 41.7% of families)
- **Institutional fundraising** - Annual giving campaigns, galas, donor contributions
- **Endowment income** - Investment returns from accumulated gifts
- **Religious sponsorship** - Parish or diocese support for faith-based schools

- **Volunteer labor** - Parent and community contributions reducing operational costs

This means private schools may spend \$8,000, \$10,000, or more per student when combining public ESA funds with private revenue - but the public cost remains \$7,220 per student regardless of total institutional expenditure.

6.3.3 Interpreting Expenditure Comparisons Responsibly

For policymakers evaluating GATOR's fiscal impact on Louisiana's budget, allocation comparison answers the relevant policy question: *How much public funding goes to each student?*

The state allocates \$9,568 per student in MFP funding for public schools. The state allocates \$7,220 per student in ESA awards for GATOR participants. The difference, \$2,348 per student, represents the fiscal impact to state budgets.

Total expenditure comparisons (\$17,778 in public schools versus variable amounts in private schools) reflect different financial ecosystems rather than direct public cost alternatives. Public schools cannot access private fundraising, tuition supplements, or endowment income at scale. Private schools cannot access federal categorical grants, issue municipal bonds for construction, or operate under collective bargaining agreements that affect public school compensation structures.

The expenditure differential exists, but it answers a different question: *What is the comprehensive cost of operating a school?* versus *What does the state allocate per student?* For Louisiana's legislature evaluating GATOR's budget impact, allocation provides the clearer, more defensible comparison.

6.4 Methodological Caveat: Marginal Cost vs. Average Cost

6.4.1 Fixed Costs and Enrollment Elasticity

The allocation comparison requires one important caveat. The \$2,348 per-student difference represents average cost - total allocation divided by enrollment. The actual fiscal impact when students leave public schools depends on marginal cost - how much school systems save when educating one fewer student.

Public schools face significant fixed costs that do not decrease proportionally with modest enrollment declines. A school building designed for 600 students costs nearly the same to maintain and operate whether it serves 600 or 550 students. Bus routes continue running, central administration persists, and debt service on construction bonds remains unchanged. With 5,546 GATOR students representing less than 1% of Louisiana's 684,000 public school students, the marginal savings per departing student may fall below the \$2,348 average allocation difference.

6.4.2 Conditions Under Which Marginal Savings Could Rise

Conversely, if public schools operate near capacity and losing students allows systems to avoid new construction or reduce staffing in meaningful ways, marginal savings could approach or exceed average allocation amounts. This evaluation cannot determine marginal cost without detailed district-level operational analysis beyond its scope.

6.4.3 Implications for Interpreting Fiscal Projections

The \$2,348 allocation difference and resulting fiscal projections therefore represent potential savings rather than guaranteed budget reductions. Actual fiscal impact depends on how individual school systems adjust operations, staffing, facilities, and services when enrollment shifts to private schools through GATOR.

6.5 Primary Framework and Supporting Context

6.5.1 Allocation-Based Fiscal Conclusion

This evaluation uses allocation comparison as its primary fiscal framework, consistent with publicly available Louisiana Department of Education MFP funding structures. Under the current formula, public schools receive \$9,568 per student in combined state and local MFP allocation, while the average GATOR ESA award is \$7,220 per participating student. This reflects a \$2,348 difference in allocation per student, or approximately 24.5% lower state and local formula allocation relative to the MFP benchmark.

At current enrollment levels of 5,546 GATOR students, the aggregate allocation differential equals approximately \$13 million annually when calculated strictly on a formula basis (the state would allocate \$13MM less to GATOR than it would to public schools in the MFP formula). This figure reflects differences in state and local allocation flows under current funding mechanisms and does not represent verified operating savings.

Whether allocation differences translate into realized fiscal savings depends on several structural factors, including marginal cost elasticity within public school systems, fixed cost persistence, enrollment-driven revenue adjustments, parish-level ad valorem tax structures, and capital expenditure obligations. Because public education funding includes both variable and fixed cost components, reductions in enrollment do not necessarily produce proportional reductions in operating expenditures.

Public schools report total expenditures of approximately \$17,778 per student when all revenue sources are included. By contrast, private schools participating in GATOR operate under a blended funding model, combining ESA awards with private tuition payments, philanthropic contributions, fundraising revenue, and endowment support. These differing financial structures limit the validity of direct total-expenditure comparisons across sectors.

For these reasons, allocation comparison provides a clear and transparent starting point for fiscal analysis under current statutory funding formulas. A comprehensive fiscal impact study incorporating marginal cost modeling, parish-level revenue dynamics, and

longitudinal enrollment trends would represent a necessary next phase for determining net taxpayer impact.

6.5.2 Cross-Pillar Outcome Context for Cost Evaluation

The academic outcomes documented in Pillar I (97.5% graduation rate, 88.1% college enrollment, ACT scores of 21), safety advantages in Pillar II (95% lower bullying and suspension rates), and family satisfaction data in Pillar IV (99% would recommend, 99% plan to continue) provide context for evaluating whether the \$2,348 allocation difference represents effective use of public funds.

6.5.3 Legislative Decision Framing

The Louisiana Legislature must determine whether these outcomes justify continued or expanded GATOR investment at current allocation levels. This evaluation provides the fiscal and outcome data necessary for that determination using the allocation framework LDOE identified as the appropriate comparison methodology.

6.6 Study Coverage and Headline Findings

6.6.1 Study Coverage

- All Louisiana school districts analyzed for 2023-2024 per-pupil expenditure

- 190 Surveyed private schools that submitted institutional and academic data across Louisiana parishes
- 1,300 individual student records with demographics and performance metrics
- 50 GATOR-participating parishes covered in cost analysis

6.6.2 Key Findings Summary

- Public MFP allocation is \$9,568 per student compared to GATOR ESA awards of \$7,220 (24.5% lower public cost)
- GATOR schools achieve 97.5% graduation rates vs. ~80% public school average
- College enrollment reaches 88.1% vs. ~62% public school average (26-point advantage)
- Average ACT scores: 21 vs. 18.2 state average (2.8-point improvement)
- Student-teacher ratios 30% smaller (12:1 vs. 18:1)
- 80% of students plan to continue using ESA scholarships

6.7 Cost-Effectiveness Narrative and Comparative Metrics

6.7.1 The Cost-Effectiveness Story

Louisiana's Minimum Foundation Program allocates \$9,568 per student (\$5,534 state + \$4,034 local) for public education in the 50 parishes where GATOR operates. GATOR ESA

vouchers provide an average of \$7,220 per student, representing 75.5% of public MFP allocation. This creates a \$2,348 annual allocation difference per student. Despite receiving 24.5% less in public allocation, participating private schools demonstrate equal or superior outcomes across key metrics. Graduation rates exceed public schools by 17.5 percentage points. College enrollment surpasses public school rates by 26 points. ACT scores average 2.8 points higher. These outcomes, achieved with 24.5% lower public cost, demonstrate substantial value per taxpayer dollar invested. Current analyzed program enrollment of 1,300 students generates \$3 million in annual savings to state and local budgets compared to traditional public schooling. Louisiana's Phase 1 GATOR application pool exceeded 40,000 families. Expanding the program to serve these applicants would generate \$93.9 million in annual savings to state and local MFP allocations, with ten-year cumulative savings reaching \$939 million.



6.7.2 Summary Comparison Table (Cost and Outcomes)

Table 6.1 Comparison of Louisiana Public Schools and GATOR Schools

Metric	Louisiana Public Schools	GATOR Schools	Difference
Cost per student	\$9,568	\$7,220	-\$2,348 (-24.5%)
Graduation rate	~80%	97.5%	+17.5 pp
College enrollment	~62%	88.1%	+26.1 pp
Average ACT score	18.2	21.0	+2.8 points
Student-teacher ratio	18:1	12.5:1	30% smaller

COST COMPARISON OF LA GATOR AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Average class size	~22 students	15.4 students	30% smaller
Chronic absenteeism	20.8%	6.3%	-14.5 pp
Suspension rate	9.6%	0.62%	-8.98 pp
Bullying incidents	5.7%	0.32%	-5.38 pp

Note: Public school benchmarks reflect Louisiana Department of Education 2022-2023 statewide averages where noted. GATOR school data reflect institutional surveys and student records from 2025-2026 academic year. Source: Louisiana Department of Education, Per-Pupil Expenditure Reports (2024); LDOE GATOR FAQ (2025); GATOR Parent Survey (2026); Surveyed Private Schools (2026)

6.7.3 Guiding Evaluation Questions

This section will address three questions in the coming findings.

1. Cost Efficiency: Do GATOR schools deliver comparable or superior educational outcomes at significantly lower per-student expenditure compared to Louisiana public schools?

2. Outcome Quality: Across graduation rates, college enrollment, standardized assessment performance, and behavioral metrics, how do GATOR student outcomes compare to Louisiana public school averages?

3. Fiscal Sustainability: At current and projected enrollment levels, does GATOR represent a net cost or net savings to Louisiana taxpayers when accounting for the per-student expenditure differential between public and private school attendance?

6.8 Cost Comparison Analysis

6.8.1 GATOR ESA Allocation Compared to Public School MFP Allocation

Analysis of Louisiana's 2023-2024 per-pupil expenditure data reveals substantial cost differentials between traditional public schooling and the GATOR ESA program. The average ESA voucher provides \$7,220 per student, varying by grade level from \$5,735 for elementary to \$6,845 for high school students. Public schools across Louisiana averaged \$16,294 expenditure per student statewide during the same period, 159% higher than ESA allocations.

Within the 50 parishes participating in GATOR, public schools receive \$9,568 per student in MFP allocation compared to \$7,220 in GATOR ESA awards, a difference of \$2,348 per student. This represents GATOR operating at 75.5% of public MFP allocation while serving similar student populations. Public schools in these parishes spend \$17,778 per student in total expenditure when including federal funds, capital costs, and district services, while private schools supplement the \$7,220 ESA award through tuition, fundraising, and private donations.

Table 6.2 GATOR ESA Voucher Compared to LA MFP Allocation & LA Total Expenditure.
Source: Louisiana Department of Education, MFP Allocation Data (2024); LDOE GATOR FAQ (2025)

Category	Amount	vs. ESA
GATOR ESA Voucher (average)	\$7,220	Baseline
Louisiana MFP Allocation (state + local)	\$9,568	+\$2,348

Louisiana Total Expenditure (statewide)	\$16,294	+\$9,074
GATOR Parishes Average (50 parishes)	\$17,778	+\$10,558

6.8.2 Fiscal Implications and Allocation Impact

Current analyzed enrollment of 1,300 GATOR participants reflects a measurable allocation differential under Louisiana’s existing school funding framework. If these students were funded through the public system in the 50 participating parishes, the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) allocation would average \$9,568 per student in combined state and local formula funding. Public school systems in these parishes report average total per-pupil expenditures of approximately \$17,778 when including state allocation, local ad valorem (property) taxes, voter-approved local sales taxes, federal program funding (including Title allocations), capital costs, and district-level services.

Under the GATOR program, these 1,300 students receive ESA awards averaging \$7,220 per student, totaling approximately \$9.4 million in formula-based state allocation. Relative to the MFP allocation amount, this represents a \$2,348 per-student difference, or approximately \$3 million in annual allocation differential under current funding formulas.

It is important to distinguish allocation differentials from immediate operational savings. Local property tax millages and dedicated local sales taxes are voter-approved revenue streams and do not automatically decline with enrollment shifts. Similarly, federal education funds are distributed according to federal formulas and categorical

requirements. The fiscal implications of enrollment movement therefore depend on marginal cost structures, scale effects, and district-level expenditure flexibility, which warrant further analysis.

This evaluation uses allocation comparison as the primary fiscal framework consistent with Louisiana Department of Education guidance, while recognizing that total expenditure figures reflect broader financial structures beyond formula funding.

Projected savings at expanded enrollment:

- 40,000 students: \$93.9 million allocation difference
- Current enrollment over 5 years: \$15.2 million allocation difference
- Expanded enrollment over 10 years: \$939 million allocation difference

6.8.3 Where GATOR Students Come From: Actual Prior School Costs

Among the 334 first-year GATOR students whose prior public schools could be matched to Louisiana per-pupil expenditure data, 87 students (26.0%) had prior schools that could be identified in the state database through name matching. These 87 students attended public schools that averaged \$16,888 per student in per-pupil expenditure, slightly above the statewide average and below the 50-parish GATOR average.

The matched sample includes students from:

- St. John the Baptist Parish schools: \$17,640-\$25,883 per student

- Jefferson Parish schools: \$14,000-\$18,000 per student
- Rapides Parish schools: \$13,000-\$17,000 per student
- Washington Parish schools: \$16,000-\$17,000 per student

These prior public school costs represent the actual per-student expenditure Louisiana was making on individual GATOR recipients before their transition to private schools. The range from \$13,000 to \$25,883 demonstrates significant variation in public school costs across parishes and individual schools.

6.8.4 Current Private School Costs

Among the 204 first-year GATOR students whose current private schools reported tuition data, annual tuition averaged \$6,034 (median \$6,200). Private school tuition ranged from \$4,140 to \$14,127, with 96.6% of students (197 of 204) attending schools with reported numbers charging less than the \$2,348 cost differential between GATOR scholarships and MFP allocation.

Reported Tuition Distribution:

- Under \$5,000: 15 students (7.4%)
- \$5,000-\$6,999: 168 students (82.4%)
- \$7,000-\$8,999: 14 students (6.9%)
- \$9,000+: 7 students (3.4%)

For the 46 students with both matched prior public school costs and current private school tuition data, the mean cost differential was \$10,006 per student annually (\$16,888 prior public cost - \$6,882 current private tuition = \$10,006 savings).

6.8.5 Fiscal Impact to Louisiana Taxpayers

Current Program Savings (1,300 analyzed students):

If the 1,300 students analyzed in this evaluation had remained in Louisiana public schools, the state would allocate \$12.4 million annually in MFP funding (\$9,568 per student). Under GATOR, these students receive ESA awards averaging \$7,220, for a total program cost of \$9.4 million annually. This represents \$3 million in annual allocation savings, or \$2,348 per student. Over a five-year period, current program enrollment generates \$15.2 million in cumulative savings to state and local MFP budgets

Projected Expansion Savings:

Louisiana's Phase 1 GATOR application pool exceeded 40,000 families. Expanding the program to serve these applicants would require approximately \$288.8 million in scholarship funding (40,000 students × \$7,220 average). Simultaneously, educating these students in traditional public schools would cost \$711.1 million (40,000 students × \$17,778 average per-pupil expenditure in GATOR parishes).

Net fiscal impact: \$422.3 million in annual taxpayer savings while serving families who have applied for the program. Over ten years, expanded enrollment would generate \$939 million in cumulative savings compared to traditional public school attendance for this population.

Table 6.3 Comparison of Cost and Savings (Current vs. Expansion). Source: Authors' calculations based on Louisiana Department of Education (2024, 2025)

Enrollment Scenario	Scholarship Cost	Public School Cost	Annual Savings	10-Year Savings
Current (1,300)	\$9.4M	\$12.4M	\$3M	\$30.5M
Expansion (40,000)	\$288.8M	\$382.7M	\$93.9M	\$939M

6.8.6 Family Financial Contributions and Access Equity

Survey data provides additional context regarding the financial structure of GATOR participation at the household level.

Among 24 families reporting tuition expenditures, 41.7% indicate contributing funds beyond their ESA award. The mean additional contribution among those families is \$431, while the median out-of-pocket contribution across respondents is \$0. This distribution suggests that many families either receive sufficient ESA coverage or supplement awards through school-based aid, while a subset incurs additional personal expense.

Among 19 families reporting total cost of education, the mean annual tuition and related cost is \$8,241 compared to a mean ESA award of \$7,220, indicating an average funding gap of approximately \$1,021 per student within the reporting sample.

These findings suggest that ESA awards do not universally eliminate out-of-pocket costs for participating families. While many schools provide institutional financial aid, modest funding gaps may remain for certain households.

Given that 63.8% of participating families qualify as economically disadvantaged and 35.2% report household incomes between \$25,000 and \$49,999, even limited financial gaps could influence access dynamics for the lowest-income families.

This evaluation does not determine the extent to which financial gaps affect participation decisions statewide. However, the presence of supplemental contributions within the reporting sample indicates that ESA award sufficiency represents an important variable in assessing program accessibility and equity.

Financial Gap Analysis:

- Mean ESA award amount: \$7,220
- Mean total cost of education: \$8,241
- Average funding gap: \$1,021
- Families contributing beyond ESA: 41.7%
- Mean out-of-pocket contribution: \$431
- Median out-of-pocket contribution: \$0

6.9 Limitations and Counterarguments

This evaluation establishes that GATOR ESA awards (\$7,220) represent 75.5% of Louisiana's public MFP allocation (\$9,568), and that participating schools achieve measurable outcomes in graduation rates, college enrollment, and parent satisfaction. However, several important limitations and counterarguments require acknowledgment, and areas exist where additional analysis would strengthen understanding of GATOR's fiscal and educational impact.

6.9.1 Marginal Cost vs. Average Cost: The Fixed Cost Challenge

The fiscal projections presented in this evaluation compare average costs as total allocation divided by enrollment. Public schools do not necessarily save the full per-pupil allocation when students leave. Public education involves substantial fixed costs that do not decrease proportionally with enrollment declines. School buildings continue requiring maintenance regardless of occupancy levels. Transportation routes persist with minimal adjustment for enrollment changes. Central administration overhead remains largely unchanged, and debt service on construction bonds continues regardless of student count.

With 5,546 GATOR students representing 0.8% of Louisiana's 684,000 public school students, the marginal savings per departing student may differ from the \$2,348 average allocation difference. Public school systems cannot close buildings, eliminate bus routes, or reduce administration proportionally when enrollment declines represent less than 1% of

total students. The fiscal projections presented should therefore be understood as estimates based on allocation formulas rather than verified operational savings.

A more precise fiscal analysis would require district-level operational data on staffing adjustments, facility utilization changes, per-pupil cost trends at affected schools, and operational efficiency modifications following enrollment shifts. **This evaluation recommends district-level case studies as a priority for future research** to establish actual marginal cost impacts rather than relying on average allocation differences. Future fiscal modeling should incorporate parish-level fixed cost distribution, ad valorem revenue structures, enrollment elasticity assumptions, and capital expenditure allocation to determine net taxpayer impact. Partnership with independent academic institutions would strengthen this modeling framework.

6.9.2 Local Tax Revenue Impact

This evaluation focuses on state MFP allocation but does not comprehensively address local tax implications. Louisiana school districts fund operations through local property taxes and sales taxes. When students transition from public to private schools through GATOR, several fiscal dynamics warrant examination: property tax obligations for private schools, changes in local millage rates as enrollment shifts, sales tax revenue allocated to education, and the distribution of local tax burdens across sectors.

This evaluation lacks comprehensive data on parish-by-parish local tax contributions to education across public and private sectors, whether participating private schools pay local education taxes, how local millage rates have adjusted as program enrollment changed, and the proportion of public school funding derived from local sources in areas with GATOR participation.

A complete fiscal analysis requires parish tax assessor data, local revenue collection reports showing education tax receipts over time, analysis of millage rate adjustments, and examination of how local tax obligations distribute across educational sectors. **The \$2,348 per-student calculation addresses state allocation but does not capture local fiscal dynamics.** Future analysis should prioritize obtaining parish-level tax data to complete the fiscal picture. District-level case studies in areas with substantial GATOR participation could provide detailed local revenue impact data including property tax assessments, local sales tax allocations, and per-pupil local funding trends.

6.9.3 Selection Effects and Causality

The outcomes documented in this evaluation: 97.5% graduation rates, 88.1% college enrollment, reported parent satisfaction, may reflect characteristics of families who choose GATOR rather than effects of the program itself. Families selecting private schools through GATOR may differ systematically from families remaining in public schools. Parents who navigate ESA application processes, arrange transportation to private schools, and

potentially supplement ESA awards with additional payments likely demonstrate characteristics associated with educational success regardless of school sector.

Without baseline academic data from students' prior performance, this evaluation cannot establish causal relationships between GATOR participation and observed outcomes. The outcomes may indicate that the program serves families positioned for success in multiple educational settings, that private schools enroll students with stronger prior performance, or that selection processes rather than educational interventions drive results.

Establishing causal impact would require student-level baseline data including prior test scores, grades, and attendance; comparison groups of similar students in different settings; statistical controls for selection; and analysis of outcome changes following school transitions. **This evaluation presents descriptive outcomes and parent-reported experiences but cannot make causal claims.** Parent reports of improvement provide one perspective but require verification through longitudinal data with baseline comparisons.

6.9.4 Areas Requiring Further Analysis

Several areas beyond those above would strengthen understanding of program impact.

Public and private schools serve different student populations, particularly regarding special education services. If student populations differ in service needs, cost comparisons

may reflect service mix differences rather than efficiency differences. Analysis of special education enrollment rates and service costs across sectors would clarify this question.

Public schools typically provide universal transportation while private schools often do not. Understanding family transportation costs and accessibility barriers would complete the cost picture from the family perspective.

This evaluation examines current enrollment. Long-term outcomes including college completion and workforce success remain unknown. Longitudinal tracking would establish whether observed outcomes at program exit translate into sustained success.

Current enrollment represents a small fraction of Louisiana's student population. Program dynamics may change at different scales, and capacity constraints may affect expansion. Analysis of private school enrollment capacity and quality maintenance at scale would inform expansion decisions.

Private and public schools operate under different accountability frameworks.

Standardized testing data availability differs across sectors. Consistent accountability measures would enable better quality monitoring as enrollment changes.

6.10 Scope and Limitations of This Analysis

6.10.1 What This Analysis Establishes

This evaluation establishes that GATOR ESA awards equal 75.5% of public MFP allocation, that participating schools report strong graduation and college enrollment outcomes, and that surveyed families report high satisfaction. However, this evaluation cannot determine whether fiscal projections based on allocation formulas match actual operational savings, does not address local tax revenue dynamics comprehensively, cannot establish causal relationships between program participation and outcomes, does not track long-term participant success, and does not assess program effects at different enrollment scales.

6.10.2 What This Analysis Cannot Determine

The available evidence indicates that GATOR operates within Louisiana's educational landscape at lower state allocation levels while serving families who report positive experiences. However, the fiscal projections should be understood as estimates based on allocation formulas rather than verified operational impacts. Marginal cost considerations and incomplete local tax data mean actual fiscal effects may differ from projections.

This evaluation does not measure student-level growth trajectories, matched pre-post outcomes, or causal impact relative to prior public enrollment. Such analysis requires

longitudinal tracking infrastructure not currently mandated within Louisiana's ESA framework.

6.10.3 Future Research Priorities for Comprehensive Assessment

Future research priorities include district-level case studies examining actual operational cost changes and local tax impacts, longitudinal student tracking with baseline data to assess program effects, service cost analysis to ensure comparable populations, and capacity studies to assess expansion feasibility. Louisiana policymakers should view this evaluation as initial analysis establishing program characteristics and participant outcomes while acknowledging limitations requiring additional investigation for comprehensive fiscal and educational impact assessment.



SYNTHESIS: KEY FINDINGS ACROSS FIVE PILLARS

7.1 Overview and Analytical Scope

7.1.1 Synthesis Purpose and Central Policy Question

Louisiana's GATOR ESA program demonstrates measurable outcomes across five interconnected dimensions. This synthesis presents the central findings from each pillar and examines how they combine to address the fundamental policy question: does GATOR deliver educational value for participating families at sustainable public cost?

7.2 Five-Pillar Evidence Base

7.2.1 Academic Outcomes

GATOR schools achieve graduation rates of 97.5% compared to approximately 80% in Louisiana public schools. College enrollment reaches 88.1% versus 62% statewide, a 26-percentage-point advantage. ACT scores average 21.0, exceeding the Louisiana average of 18.2 by 2.8 points. Student-teacher ratios of 12.5:1 compare favorably to public school averages of 18:1. These outcomes emerge from data covering 1,300 students across 27 reporting schools, with parent surveys from 105 families providing validation through reported experiences.

7.2.2 Safety and Environment

GATOR participating schools operate across Louisiana's full crime spectrum, with 38.4% located in Very High crime zones. The program enables families to prioritize school environment over neighborhood assignment rather than requiring geographic relocation. Participating schools demonstrate bullying incident rates 95% lower than public schools (0.3% vs 5.7%) and suspension rates 95% lower (0.5% vs 9.6%). Emergency response times average 2.28 minutes faster. Parent surveys validate institutional safety data, with 83.8% of families reporting improved social-emotional wellbeing and 99% indicating they feel their child is safe at school, compared to just 48% who felt safe at their prior public school.

7.2.3 Academic Opportunities

Five reporting schools offer 223 combined Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment courses. Average class sizes of 15.4 students enable individualized attention unavailable in larger public school settings. Students demonstrate 96.2% technology access at home and 95.2% internet connectivity, supporting digital learning. Special education services reach 11.4% of students, comparable to public school rates. Parents report that 85.7% of students demonstrate academic improvement compared to prior schooling, with families describing expanded access to rigorous coursework and individualized support as transformative.

7.2.4 Campus Life

Responding schools offer an average of 6.8 athletic programs and 7.3 non-athletic extracurricular activities per school. Systemwide data across all 190 schools shows more limited offerings, an average of 0.9 athletic and 1.0 non-athletic programs per school, yet 69.5% of students participate in extracurricular activities and 76.7% report increased involvement compared to prior public schooling. This suggests that smaller school sizes create accessibility advantages despite fewer total program offerings. Active parent organizations operate at 25 schools, and 92.4% of families provide weekly homework support. Family satisfaction transforms dramatically: 78.1% rate their current school 5 out of 5 compared to 42.9% who rated their prior public school 0 out of 5.

7.2.5 Success Factors

GATOR schools demonstrate operational characteristics associated with positive educational outcomes. Truancy averages 0.70%, with 63.6% of schools reporting zero truancy. Chronic absenteeism reaches 6.3% compared to 20.8% in public schools. Teacher retention averages 88.7%, with 94.1% of schools maintaining retention above 80%. Teacher certification rates average 74.9%, varying substantially across schools. Parental engagement remains consistently high: 85.7% attended parent-teacher conferences and 92.4% provide weekly homework help. Disciplinary incidents occur rarely, with 93.1% of students recording zero incidents across the academic year.

7.3 The Cost-Value Relationship

7.3.1 Allocation-Based Cost Comparison

GATOR ESA awards average \$7,220 per student according to Louisiana Department of Education data for 5,546 participating students in 2025-26. Louisiana's Minimum Foundation Program allocates \$9,568 per student in state and local funding (\$5,534 state + \$4,034 local). GATOR ESA awards therefore equal 75.5% of public MFP allocation, representing a \$2,348 per-student difference or 24.5% lower public cost.

7.3.2 Enrollment Scenarios and Fiscal Projections

At current enrollment of 5,546 students, this generates \$13 million in annual fiscal impact to state and local MFP allocations. Louisiana's Phase 1 GATOR application pool exceeded 40,000 families. Expanding to serve this demonstrated demand would require \$288.8 million in ESA funding but would replace \$382.7 million in MFP allocation generating \$93.9 million in annual savings and \$939 million over ten years based on allocation formulas.

7.3.3 Expenditure Context and Different Financial Models

Public schools in GATOR parishes spend \$17,778 per student in total expenditure when including federal funds, capital costs, and district services beyond state and local allocation. Private schools supplement the \$7,220 ESA award through tuition contributions (41.7% of families report additional payments averaging \$1,795), institutional fundraising,

endowment income, and religious sponsorship. This reflects fundamentally different financial models rather than direct cost comparison.

7.3.4 Cost-Value Interpretation with Analytical Cautions

The outcomes documented across five pillars: 97.5% graduation, 88.1% college enrollment, 95% lower safety incidents, expanded academic opportunities, and 99% family satisfaction provide context for evaluating whether the 24.5% allocation difference represents effective use of public funds. The analysis cannot establish causal relationships between GATOR participation and observed outcomes without baseline student performance data. The fiscal projections represent allocation formula differences rather than verified operational savings given marginal cost considerations and incomplete local tax revenue analysis. A comprehensive fiscal impact study incorporating marginal cost modeling, fixed cost persistence, and parish-level revenue structures represents a logical next phase of this baseline evaluation.

7.4 What the Evidence Establishes

7.4.1 Conclusion One: Family Satisfaction and Improvement

Participating families report substantial satisfaction and improvement. The transformation from 42.9% rating prior public schools 0 out of 5 to 78.1% rating GATOR schools 5 out of 5 represents meaningful change in family experience. That 85.7% report

academic improvement, 99% feel their child is safe, and 99% plan to continue using ESA scholarships demonstrates program value from the family perspective.

7.4.2 Conclusion Two: Measurable Outcomes Across Domains

Participating schools demonstrate measurable outcomes across multiple domains.

Graduation rates of 97.5%, college enrollment of 88.1%, truancy of 0.7%, and chronic absenteeism of 6.3% represent favorable indicators across academic and engagement metrics. These outcomes occur despite GATOR schools operating across Louisiana's full crime spectrum and serving student populations including 11.4% with disabilities.

7.4.3 Conclusion Three: Lower Public Allocation Requirement

GATOR ESA awards require lower public allocation than Louisiana's MFP formula. The \$7,220 average award equals 75.5% of the \$9,568 MFP allocation per student, representing 24.5% lower state and local funding requirements. Whether actual operational savings match allocation-based projections depends on marginal cost realities and local tax dynamics requiring additional analysis.

7.4.4 Conclusion Four: Analytical Limits on Causal Interpretation

Important analytical limitations constrain causal interpretation. Without baseline student performance data, selection effects cannot be ruled out. Families choosing private schools through GATOR likely differ systematically from families remaining in public

schools. The strong outcomes observed may reflect characteristics of families who navigate ESA applications, arrange transportation, and supplement awards rather than effects of GATOR schools themselves. Establishing causality would require longitudinal tracking with statistical controls unavailable in this evaluation.

7.5 What the Evidence Cannot Establish

While this evaluation identifies measurable differences across multiple domains, several analytical boundaries remain.

First, the study does not establish causal attribution between GATOR participation and observed academic or safety outcomes. Without pre-transition baseline performance data or matched comparison cohorts, selection effects cannot be ruled out.

Second, institutional reporting is substantial but not universal. Because participation in surveys and institutional data submission was voluntary, findings reflect participating schools and families rather than the full eligible population.

Third, fiscal comparisons are allocation-based. Differences between MFP formula funding and ESA awards represent formula-level allocation differentials under current funding structures. These figures do not constitute verified operational savings and do not account for fixed cost obligations, local property tax structures, dedicated sales tax millages, or federal funding mechanisms.

Fourth, the evaluation does not measure long-term outcomes such as postsecondary completion, workforce participation, income mobility, or broader economic development effects.

These boundaries define the current scope of evidence. They do not negate observed patterns, but they establish the parameters within which findings should be interpreted.

7.6 Implications for Louisiana Policymakers

7.6.1 Policy Decision Framing

Louisiana's legislature faces a policy decision rather than a purely empirical question. The available evidence demonstrates that GATOR serves families who report high satisfaction while attending schools that achieve measurable outcomes across graduation, college enrollment, safety, and engagement metrics. These outcomes occur at 75.5% of public MFP allocation. However, causal relationships remain unestablished, fiscal projections represent upper bounds subject to marginal cost realities, and analytical limitations prevent definitive conclusions.

Three policy perspectives frame the decision:

7.6.2 Perspective One: Outcomes Perspective

The outcomes perspective emphasizes that 97.5% graduation rates and 99% family satisfaction represent meaningful results regardless of causation. From this view, the

program demonstrably serves participating families well, and 40,000 additional families seeking access suggests unmet demand for educational alternatives. Whether GATOR causes outcomes or attracts already-successful families matters less than whether the state should fund educational options that families value and where students demonstrate favorable indicators.

7.6.3 Perspective Two: Fiscal Responsibility Perspective

The fiscal responsibility perspective emphasizes that allocation-based savings projections require verification through district-level operational analysis before confident expansion decisions. From this view, the 24.5% allocation difference may not translate into proportional taxpayer savings given fixed public school costs and incomplete local revenue analysis. Policymakers require more precise fiscal impact assessment including marginal cost studies and parish-level tax analysis before committing to large-scale expansion.

7.6.4 Perspective Three: Evidence-Building Perspective

The evidence-building perspective emphasizes that current data limitations, including absent baseline performance and no longitudinal tracking, prevent confident causal claims. From this view, Louisiana should continue the program at current scale while implementing rigorous evaluation infrastructure including baseline data collection, comparison groups, and multi-year outcome tracking before expansion decisions.

7.6.5 Balancing Frameworks and Legislative Judgment

Each perspective reflects legitimate priorities. The outcomes perspective prioritizes family satisfaction and demonstrated indicators. The fiscal responsibility perspective prioritizes verified taxpayer impact. The evidence-building perspective prioritizes causal understanding before scale. Louisiana's legislature must weigh these frameworks based on the state's educational goals, fiscal constraints, and tolerance for expanding programs with demonstrated family demand but acknowledged analytical limitations.

7.7 Research Priorities

Future analysis should prioritize district-level case studies in parishes with substantial GATOR participation to establish actual operational cost changes versus allocation-based projections, examine local tax revenue impacts including property and sales tax obligations across sectors, and determine whether marginal savings match average allocation differences. Longitudinal student tracking with baseline academic data would enable propensity score matching or similar methods to control for selection effects and establish whether outcomes improve following GATOR enrollment or remain stable. Special education cost analysis would determine whether service populations differ across sectors and whether cost comparisons reflect efficiency differences or service mix differences. Private school capacity assessment would inform whether the sector can absorb

enrollment expansion to 40,000 students while maintaining quality standards and geographic accessibility.

7.8 Conclusion

7.8.1 Synthesis of Outcomes, Cost, and Limitations

Louisiana's GATOR ESA program demonstrates measurable outcomes for participating families at lower public allocation levels than the state's MFP formula. Participating schools achieve 97.5% graduation rates, families report 99% satisfaction, and the \$7,220 average ESA award equals 75.5% of public MFP allocation. Important limitations exist: causal relationships cannot be established without baseline data, fiscal projections represent allocation formulas rather than verified operational savings, and selection effects limit generalizability.

7.8.2 Legislative Decision Context

The legislature must determine whether the demonstrated family satisfaction and school-level outcomes justify continued or expanded investment given acknowledged analytical constraints. This evaluation provides the factual foundation for that determination while maintaining appropriate caution about claims extending beyond available data.

7.8.3 Final Evidence-Based Assessment

The evidence supports GATOR as a program delivering value for participating families within Louisiana's educational landscape. Whether that value justifies expansion to 40,000 additional families requires policy judgment balancing outcomes, fiscal considerations, and tolerance for operating amid analytical uncertainty inherent in early-stage program evaluation. This evaluation does not constitute a causal return-on-investment study. Rather, it establishes descriptive baseline evidence across five domains and identifies structural requirements necessary to conduct a comprehensive ROI analysis in future phases.



CONCLUSION

8.1 Baseline Findings, Future Measurement, and the Path Forward

8.1.1 Baseline Evaluation Purpose and Scope

This Five-Pillar Baseline Evaluation provides an initial, structured assessment of the Louisiana GATOR Scholarship Program using available institutional reporting, student-level data, and parent survey responses. This study is intentionally designed as a baseline descriptive evaluation. It establishes initial cross-sectional observations necessary to inform the design of future longitudinal, student-level growth analyses.

8.1.2 What the Current Evidence Suggests

Across academic outcomes, school safety, academic opportunity, campus life, success factors, and fiscal allocation comparisons, the findings demonstrate a consistent directional pattern: participating GATOR schools are associated with strong graduation rates, higher reported college enrollment, lower disciplinary incidents, high parent satisfaction, and lower public allocation per student when compared to traditional Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) allocations.

8.1.3 What the Current Structure Cannot Yet Establish

At the same time, this report is intentionally described as a **baseline evaluation**. Data were not uniformly required across participating private schools, and response rates varied across institutional, student-level, and parent-reported measures. While the alignment across data sources strengthens confidence in directional trends, the present structure does not yet allow for definitive long-term return-on-investment (ROI) modeling, causal impact analysis, or full statewide generalization.

8.1.4 Why Longitudinal Independent Evaluation is Necessary

If Louisiana seeks to answer the most important policy question, whether GATOR produces measurable long-term educational return on public investment, more structured, non-partisan, and longitudinal data collection will be required.

8.2 The Case for Required Independent Data Collection

8.2.1 Accountability as a Policy Concern

A recurring concern in public debate is accountability: how can the state ensure that public funds directed to private institutions are producing measurable educational value?

The answer is not to retreat from evaluation; it is to strengthen it.

8.2.2 Recommended Independent Data Collection Requirements

This report recommends that participation in GATOR include a structured, independent, unbiased data study requirement for:

- Participating schools
- Participating families
- Student outcome tracking
- Standardized reporting on graduation, attendance, discipline, and post-secondary outcomes

A statutory requirement that all ESA-participating schools submit standardized academic, disciplinary, attendance, and post-secondary outcomes data annually using unified definitions would materially reduce selection bias and allow longitudinal program evaluation.

8.2.3 Why Independent Reporting Would Strengthen the Program

Such a requirement would:

- Improve transparency
- Protect taxpayers
- Strengthen legislative oversight
- Allow credible ROI modeling over time

- Reduce political polarization around the program

Accountability is not an argument against GATOR. It is an argument for institutionalizing objective measurement.

If GATOR continues, it should do so with clearer data architecture, not weaker oversight.

8.3 Addressing Structural Concerns About Education Finance

8.3.1 Framing the Finance Debate

Questions have been raised regarding the state's role in public education finance, the sustainability of ESA models, and whether GATOR represents a move toward a "money follows the child" funding system.

This evaluation does not propose dismantling Louisiana's public education funding structure. The Minimum Foundation Program remains the constitutional backbone of public education finance. GATOR operates within, not in replacement of, that structure.

Several key clarifications are important:

8.3.2 GATOR Does Not Currently Restructure the MFP

The program represents a limited allocation mechanism affecting a small percentage of total statewide enrollment. It does not alter the statutory framework governing MFP distribution.

8.3.3 Scarcity of Resources Is a Valid Policy Question, Not a Rebuttal of Outcomes

Concerns about scarce public resources are legitimate. However, resource constraints do not negate measurable outcomes. If a program demonstrates positive educational conditions at lower per-pupil allocation, the appropriate policy response is careful fiscal modeling, not dismissal.

8.3.4 Serving a Subset of Students Is Not Equivalent to Structural Abandonment

Even if GATOR remains limited in scope, programs can be evaluated on the outcomes they generate for participating students. Public policy often pilots reforms before broad expansion. The inability to serve every applicant does not invalidate measurable benefit to those served.

8.3.5 The “Money Follows the Child” Question Requires Separate Debate

Whether Louisiana should move toward a broader funding reconfiguration is a larger constitutional and fiscal conversation. The existence of GATOR does not automatically commit the state to that pathway.

This report evaluates outcomes, not philosophical funding models.

8.4 Comparative Investment Considerations

8.4.1 Alternative Education Investments and False Tradeoffs

Another concern raised is whether state resources would be better directed toward teacher training, tutoring, early childhood education, or direct public school investments.

These investments are not mutually exclusive.

Louisiana can:

- Strengthen public schools
- Expand tutoring and teacher training
- Invest in early childhood
- And evaluate ESA-based alternatives



Policy design need not be zero-sum.

8.4.2 The Relevant Fiscal Question

The relevant fiscal question is whether public allocation under GATOR generates comparable or stronger educational conditions relative to its cost. This baseline evaluation suggests it may, but confirms that stronger longitudinal data collection is necessary to calculate full ROI with precision.

8.5 Accountability as the Unifying Principle

8.5.1 Why Accountability is the Strongest Path Forward

The strongest long-term path forward is not ideological expansion or ideological opposition. It is institutional accountability. Independent evaluation is strongest when conducted outside of both regulatory authorities and policy advocacy entities. StudyTrack's structural independence from ESA platform administration and legislative advocacy positions it uniquely to conduct neutral, data-driven analysis.

8.5.2 If GATOR Continues: Recommended Accountability Measures

If GATOR continues:

- Standardized outcome reporting should be required.
- Independent third-party evaluation should be mandated.
- Longitudinal tracking of post-secondary persistence and workforce outcomes should be incorporated.
- Fiscal impact modeling should distinguish between average allocation and marginal cost effects.

Such reforms would directly address concerns about provider accountability, teacher availability, public school impact, and resource stewardship.

Accountability strengthens public education, regardless of sector.

8.6 Final Assessment

8.6.1 Summary of Baseline Findings

This baseline evaluation finds that participating GATOR schools, based on available data, demonstrate:

- Higher graduation rates
- Higher college enrollment
- Lower disciplinary incidents
- Smaller class sizes
- Strong parent engagement
- Lower public allocation per student

8.6.2 What These Findings Do and Do Not Establish

These findings do not claim universal coverage, nor do they resolve every fiscal or philosophical question surrounding education finance. They establish an evidence-based starting point.

8.6.3 The Next Phase: Rigorous Movement

The next phase should not be whether to measure outcomes; it should be how rigorously Louisiana chooses to do so.

CONCLUSION

This baseline evaluation demonstrates both the potential of the GATOR program and the structural limitations of voluntary reporting. The evidence presented herein reflects participating institutions operating within an optional data-submission framework. While informative, this structure limits statewide generalizability and cross-sector precision.

If Louisiana elects to pair ESA continuation or expansion with structured, independent, non-partisan data collection requirements, the state would materially strengthen its accountability architecture. A next-phase framework could include:

- Required annual academic, attendance, disciplinary, and graduation reporting from all ESA-participating schools
- Unified definitions for bullying, suspension, truancy, and disciplinary incidents across sectors
- Standardized assessment reporting alignment sufficient to permit cross-sector comparison
- Postsecondary enrollment verification through state-level data matching
- Longitudinal student tracking using anonymized identifiers to measure pre- and post-enrollment growth
- Cross-sector accountability dashboards enabling transparent, comparable reporting

Such measures would not alter school autonomy or instructional design. Rather, they would ensure that public allocation decisions are informed by standardized, verifiable evidence.

CONCLUSION

With a structured data infrastructure in place, policymakers would be equipped to calculate return on investment using longitudinal growth data, matched baseline comparisons, and refined fiscal modeling incorporating marginal cost realities. Accountability would become structural rather than episodic.

States considering ESA expansion often confront accountability design challenges.

Louisiana's willingness to engage in independent baseline evaluation provides a replicable framework for other states seeking to pair educational choice with structured

transparency. As a result, Louisiana is uniquely positioned to become the first state to pair ESA implementation with unified, independent accountability infrastructure. Doing so

would not only strengthen in-state policy evaluation but could establish a replicable national model for evidence-based ESA governance.

STUDYTRACK
BY STUDYVILLE

REFERENCES

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2024). *Uniform Crime Reports, 2023-2024*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

GATOR Parent Survey. (2026). Survey conducted January-February 2026 (n=105 families). Data on file with authors.

GATOR Participating School Surveys. (2026). Institutional data from 190 schools, 2025-2026 academic year. Data on file with authors.

IsoChronoAPI. (n.d.). Emergency response time calculations. Retrieved from <https://www.isochrone.com>

Louisiana Board of Regents. (2024, February 21). *High school graduates college-going and success rates*. Retrieved from <https://www.laregents.edu/022124release/>

Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement. (2024). *Crime statistics*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement.

Louisiana Department of Education. (2024). *Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) allocation data, 2023-2024*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Department of Education.

Louisiana Department of Education. (2024). *October 2024 enrollment counts*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Department of Education.

Louisiana Department of Education. (2024). *Per-pupil expenditure reports, 2023-2024*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Department of Education.

Louisiana Department of Education. (2025). *GATOR Program FAQ, 2025-2026*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Department of Education.

Louisiana Department of Education. (2023). *Louisiana Scholarship Program (LSP) data, 2022-2023*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Department of Education.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). *Parent Survey on school satisfaction*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). *Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

National Fire Protection Association. (n.d.). *Emergency response standards*. Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association.

REFERENCES

National Fire Protection Association. (n.d.). *Emergency response standards*. Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association.

NeighborhoodScout. (2024). *Crime data by location*. Location Labs, Inc. Retrieved from <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com>

Surveyed Private Schools. (2026). Institutional data from 27 participating schools, 2025-2026 academic year. Data on file with authors.

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *State regulation of private and home schools: Louisiana*. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/birth-grade-12-education/education-choice/state-regulation-of-private-and-home-schools/louisiana-state-regulation-of-private-and-home-schools>

USA Facts. (n.d.). *What is the crime rate in Louisiana?* Retrieved from <https://usafacts.org/answers/what-is-the-crime-rate-in-the-us/state/louisiana>

Appendix A. Qualitative Findings from LA GATOR Parent Focus Groups

A.1 Purpose, Scope, and Intended Use

A.1.1 Purpose and Role of the Appendix

This appendix presents qualitative findings from three LA GATOR parent focus group sessions conducted in February 2026. The purpose of this appendix is to provide implementation context and parent-experience insight that complements the report's quantitative analyses. These findings are **qualitative, parent-reported, and non-representative**; they should therefore be interpreted as illustrative evidence rather than statewide estimates.

A.1.2 De-Identification and Confidentiality Notice

All participant references in this appendix are de-identified. No individual participant is identified by name.

A.2 Data Sources and Methodological Note

A.2.1 Source Materials Used

This appendix synthesizes three focus group sessions (2/16/2026, 2/18/2026, and 2/19/2026) using:

- audio and text transcript files
- session summary documents prepared for each session

A.2.2 Participant Composition and Parent Group Types

The sessions included parents of elementary and middle-grade students and captured perspectives from both:

- families who used LA GATOR to transition from public to private school
- families already enrolled in private school who used LA GATOR to improve affordability and maintain continuity

A.3 Limitations

A.3.1 Sample and Selection Limitations

The findings in this appendix are subject to several important limitations:

- small sample size
- self-selected participants
- parent-reported experiences and perceptions
- qualitative design (not statistically generalizable)

A.3.2 Intended Interpretive Use Alongside Qualitative Evidence

These limitations are consistent with the intended use of this appendix: to identify patterns in family experience and potential implementation issues for consideration alongside quantitative evidence.

A.4 Summary of Key Qualitative Findings

A.4.1 Cross-Session Summary Themes

Across the three sessions, parents consistently described LA GATOR as a program that:

1. expanded or stabilized access to preferred school environments,
2. reduced household financial strain,
3. supported perceived improvements in student confidence and well-being,
4. improved parent confidence in school communication and responsiveness, and
5. functioned well overall, while still leaving room for administrative improvements (especially timeline certainty and renewal simplification).

A.4.2 Integrated Interpretive Summary

Taken together, the testimony suggests that families often experience LA GATOR as affecting not only school affordability, but also school fit, household stability, and day-to-day family stress.

A.5 Detailed Findings

A.5.1 Two Primary Use Cases for LA GATOR Participation

Parent testimony across the three sessions reflected two distinct pathways of participation:

A.5.1.1 Transition into Private School (Switch Families)

Some parents described using LA GATOR to move from public to private school, often citing concerns about class size, school organization, individualized attention, and safety.

A.5.1.2 Sustaining Private School Enrollment (Continuity Families)

Other parents described already being in private school and using LA GATOR to reduce tuition burden and maintain enrollment over time. In these cases, the scholarship was described less as a school-switch mechanism and more as a sustainability support.

A.5.2 Financial Relief as the Most Consistent Cross-Session Benefit

Financial relief emerged as the strongest recurring theme across all sessions. Parents described the scholarship as reducing tuition pressure, improving household flexibility, and easing month-to-month strain.

In the 2/19 session (continuity families) in particular, parents described prior financial sacrifice to sustain private-school enrollment, including extra work and reliance on support networks, and described LA GATOR as materially reducing that burden.

Several parent comments also linked financial relief to family quality-of-life outcomes (e.g., reduced stress and more time with children), rather than solely to tuition affordability.

A.5.3 School Environment, Safety, and Class Size as Central Drivers of School Choice

For families who transitioned schools, school selection was repeatedly described in terms of environment and day-to-day school conditions, not only academics. Commonly cited factors included:

- smaller class sizes
- perceived school safety
- better supervision
- stronger school order/structure
- more individualized attention

In the 2/16 session, safety was described by one parent as a primary factor in evaluating school alternatives. Another parent emphasized comfort with lower student-to-teacher ratios for a young child.

In the 2/18 session, a parent described overcrowded classrooms and limited individual attention in a prior setting, and viewed the private-school transition supported through LA GATOR as a significant improvement.

A.5.4 Parent-Reported Improvements in Student Confidence and Social-Emotional Well-Being

Across the three sessions, parents repeatedly described improvements in student confidence, school comfort, happiness, and engagement.

Parents connected these outcomes to school-level features such as:

- smaller classes
- stronger peer relationships
- more consistent behavioral expectations
- staff responsiveness

In the 2/19 session, parents also described a positive school culture and stronger school-family connectedness as contributing to student confidence and emotional stability.

A.5.5 Academic Feedback Was Generally Positive, with Useful Nuance

Parents generally described academic experiences positively, including:

- stronger individual attention
- improved progress in reading/English
- and increased day-to-day instructional support

However, the discussions also surfaced nuanced feedback about instructional differences across settings. For example, parents in the 2/16 session discussed differences in pacing and instructional style between prior public-school experiences and current private-school environments.

This non-uniform feedback strengthens the value of the qualitative data: parents described meaningful benefits while also identifying tradeoffs and variation across schools.

A.5.6 School Communication and Responsiveness as High-Value

Differentiators

Parents across sessions frequently highlighted communication quality as a major benefit of their current schools, including:

- direct teacher access
- parent portals and gradebooks
- proactive outreach
- faster notification of academic or behavioral concerns

Parents described these communication systems as increasing trust, improving visibility into student progress, and strengthening parent engagement.

A.5.7 Program Usability Was Generally Positive, with Targeted

Implementation Improvements

Parents largely described the LA GATOR scholarship process and tools as usable, including fund transfer and marketplace processes.

At the same time, parents identified several operational friction points, especially those associated with newer programs:

- uncertainty during early rollout
- delayed award notifications (including late-summer timing)
- communication gaps regarding process steps

The 2/19 session materials also captured parent suggestions for simplifying the application/renewal experience, including easier renewal workflows and automatic re-enrollment if feasible.

A.5.8 Parent “Choice” Was Often Shaped by Practical Constraints

Parents described school selection as a practical decision bounded by:

- transportation
- distance
- scheduling compatibility
- available family support for pickup/drop-off

In practice, parents often evaluated multiple schools but selected among a smaller set of realistically feasible options.

A.6 Cross-Cutting Observations for Policymakers

The qualitative evidence in these sessions suggests several broader implementation insights:

A.6.1 LA GATOR as Both an Education Program and Household-Stability

Support

Parents frequently described outcomes in terms of reduced stress, improved affordability, and increased capacity to sustain desired school placements.

A.6.2 Parent Emphasis on School Fit, Not Only School Access

The strongest parent statements focused on matching children to environments perceived as safer, smaller, and more responsive.

A.6.3 Administrative and Procedural Improvement Priorities

Common suggestions related to timing certainty, communication clarity, and renewal mechanics.

A.7 Study Scope and Limitations

This evaluation represents a baseline, multi-source analysis of participating LA GATOR schools and families. It does not constitute a randomized controlled trial, nor does it claim definitive causal proof that observed outcomes are solely attributable to program participation. Because school-level and parent-level data were collected through voluntary participation, reporting coverage is substantial but not universal.

This study does not include longitudinal pre-post growth tracking of individual students transitioning from public to private schools, nor does it incorporate matched cohort modeling across demographic subgroups statewide. Fiscal estimates reflect allocation comparisons under current funding formulas and do not represent verified system-wide marginal savings.

These limitations are not weaknesses of intent, but constraints of scope. They also define the roadmap for Louisiana's next phase of education accountability leadership.

A.8 Conclusion

Although the focus groups are anecdotal and non-generalizable, they provide critical implementation insight into how LA GATOR operates in practice. Across sessions, parents consistently described the program as materially changing their educational options, improving affordability, strengthening school fit, and enhancing their children's academic

confidence and emotional well-being. While operational adjustments could further refine delivery, the dominant and repeated theme was that LA GATOR expanded access to environments families believe are safer, more supportive, and more aligned with their values.

These qualitative findings reinforce the broader quantitative results across this evaluation. Across five pillars: academic outcomes, safety, academic opportunity, campus life, and fiscal impact, participating schools and families report meaningful differences in student experience and measurable indicators of performance. For participating families, the program is perceived as consequential.

At the same time, this evaluation represents a baseline. It establishes multi-source evidence across a substantial sample of participating schools, but it does not constitute a longitudinal growth study, a matched cohort analysis, or a comprehensive marginal fiscal model. Those next steps define Louisiana's opportunity.

To move from baseline to national leadership, Louisiana can build the country's most transparent ESA accountability system. As the program continues to evolve, aligning continued program growth with structured reporting participation will ensure that expansion is paired with measurable outcomes.

A deeper, fully funded statewide study for the 2025–2026 academic year, led by StudyTrack in formal collaboration with a Louisiana research university would enable longitudinal

student tracking, demographic matching, and advanced fiscal modeling that no other ESA state has yet implemented. Under this framework, StudyTrack would continue to serve as the program's primary data infrastructure and analytics platform, while the university partner would provide methodological oversight and independent validation to strengthen academic rigor and public confidence.

Many states are expanding school choice. Few are pairing expansion with comprehensive data transparency and outcome evaluation. Louisiana is uniquely positioned to do both.

Louisiana does not simply have the opportunity to expand school choice, it has the opportunity to define the national model for accountable educational freedom.