

# THE ACADIANA ADVOCATE

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STAFF PHOTOS BY LESLIE WESTBROOK

Owner John Tommasini and store manager Gabby Constant are pictured at the newest location of Jet Coffee, located in the Ambassador Town Center shopping center on Ambassador Caffery Parkway on April 4 in Lafayette.

## JOE ON THE GO

Amid a surge nationwide in the popularity of drive-thru coffee shops, Jet Coffee seeing rapid growth and planning its future

BY ADAM DAIGLE  
Acadiana business editor

That rooftop coffee bar at Jet Coffee? Owner John Tommasini is serious when he says it first came to him in a dream.

He dreamed he was on the roof of the new location, hitting golf balls off in the direction of what later would become Topgolf. Now, with the 528-square-foot space overlooking south Lafayette at the growing brand's 2,400-square-foot location that is by far the most unique, Tommasini is hoping it's another step in his plan to pepper south Louisiana with Jet Coffee locations.

What do you expect from a company with a slogan of "Dream On"? If it wasn't for the dream, he says now, all this might not have happened.

"We were at a construction meeting," he recalled. "Manuel Commercial built this, and (owner) Greg Manuel kind of walked in and said, 'Why don't you do a rooftop? It makes sense with Fly High, Jet Coffee and the clouds.' It took us a minute, and we decided we would do it. It's pretty crazy to think about."

When the cafe officially opened earlier this month, it marked the third location in the Lafayette area, with a fourth — the former Johnston Street Java location —



Owner John Tommasini says the rooftop coffee bar at the Jet Coffee overlooking south Lafayette came to him in a dream.

set to open in September. He will also open a roasting facility at his original location at 101 Camino Real Road.

But Tommasini said it's just the beginning. The Oregon native who first opened Jet Coffee in 2019 along with his wife, Stephanie, has big plans to open a corporate location in Baton Rouge and stores stretching from Lake Charles to

Covington and Mandeville.

"We don't care about quantity of stores. We care about having really good stores," he said. "Good stores are more fun and less stressful. We don't care about money. I care about, when I walk in, my employees are happy."

➤ See **JET COFFEE**, page 3A

### LAFAYETTE PARISH

## School Board facing \$38M challenge

Declining enrollment, increase in insurance costs contribute to problems

BY ASHLEY WHITE  
Staff writer

Years of a healthy budget have come to a halt as the Lafayette Parish School Board braces for what it is calling a \$38 million budget challenge.

Declining enrollment, an end to federal COVID-19 relief funding, an increase in specialized staffing needs and an increase in insurance costs are all contributing to the problem.

There's some hope of using one-time funds to offset the deficit, but the board will have to decide whether to make cuts before voting on a balanced budget in May.

The decisions come even after the board voted earlier this spring to accept a grant to introduce a new academic program at two schools, eliminate and move some magnet and immersion programs, and hire a strategic planner for the district.

"This has probably been the most challenging and most difficult budget in my 30 years here," school system Chief Financial Officer Matthew Dugas told board members during a budget workshop earlier this month. "If you think it's bad, it is."

The school system needs to fund \$38.2 million in unplanned expenses, Dugas said. The two biggest contributors are declining enrollment and an increase in insurance costs.

Enrollment in public schools across the U.S. has declined since the COVID-19 pandemic. The state provides per-pupil funding to schools that can be used for general items such as teacher salaries and textbooks based on annual student enrollment. Other funding comes from local taxes and the federal government.

The district budgeted for a higher

**"This is not going away. This is not sustainable. And it's not fair to our students. There is no school board fairy. Every year when there's cuts, it's real to somebody."**

JEREMY HIDALGO,  
Lafayette Parish School Board member

➤ See **CHALLENGE**, page 3A

## Flurry of bills aim to ramp up care for newborns, moms

La.'s infant mortality rate raises alarm

BY ANDREA GALLO  
Staff writer

With newborn babies and their moms dying in Louisiana at some of the highest rates in the developed world, lawmakers are considering bills that would expand health care services to pregnant women and newborns while also

increasing payment to their providers.

Louisiana's infants are 65% more likely to die from being born too early or too small than babies across the rest of the country, according to The Times-Picayune | The Advocate's analysis of federal data. The state could have seen 458 fewer infant deaths in the decade before the pandemic if its rates of preterm birth and low birth weight mirrored the national average.

➤ See **CARE**, page 5A



Andre Apparicio looks at Bree Anderson as they give testimony on the loss of their newborn child during a Black Maternal Health Advocacy Day news conference Wednesday on the steps of the State Capitol.

STAFF PHOTO  
BY JAVIER GALLEGOS

WEATHER

HIGH 74  
LOW 48

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