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COUNCIL FOR A BETTER LOUISIANA

**VOTERS STATEWIDE ACKNOWLEDGE SOME IMPROVEMENT IN PUBLIC
EDUCATION, SUPPORT REFORM EFFORTS AND
FAVOR OPTIONS TO HAVE OTHERS RUN FAILED SCHOOLS**

Orleans Parish Citizens are the Exception, Saying their Schools Are Not Improving – New Orleans Voters Want To Take Failed Schools Away from School Board And Explore Other Options for Governance

**EMBARGOED, NOT FOR RELEASE
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(Baton Rouge, LA) — Louisiana voters strongly support the state’s reform efforts to improve public education, and they believe public schools are beginning to show progress, but they are also open to other options to help accelerate improvement in schools that continue to show poor results. Those are among the findings of a new statewide survey of voters focusing on education issues released today by the Council for A Better Louisiana.

Statewide 55% of those surveyed say they believe public schools are improving either greatly or somewhat. Forty percent feel they are not improving or getting worse. The belief that schools are making progress is strongest in Acadiana and north Louisiana. Voters in metropolitan New Orleans and the Baton Rouge area see less improvement in public education.

Perhaps one reason voters believe public education is getting better is the strong support statewide for Louisiana’s school reform efforts. Sixty-nine percent of those surveyed say they support Louisiana’s school accountability program, compared with only 19% who oppose it.

More specifically, 72% say they favor the high stakes LEAP tests, which students in fourth and eighth grade must pass before being promoted to the next grade. Twenty-three percent oppose the tests. While white voters were more likely to say they support the LEAP tests (77%), a majority of African-American voters (58%) also favor the tests.

“CABL believes the results of this survey are extremely significant for Louisiana’s education reform efforts,” said CABL President Barry Erwin. “They show that voters haven’t lost hope in public education, they see signs of progress and they support the approach the state is taking to improve our schools.”

What To Do With Failed Schools . . . ? Give Someone Else A Try

The survey also shows that voters are very much open to other methods to help students in schools that continue to perform at unacceptable levels. In the survey, voters were given three options for helping students in failed schools – schools that continued to perform poorly after a period of four years. They could indicate support or opposition to one, more than one or none of the options.

Seventy-six percent said they would favor allowing a local university, the state or another group with a track record of operating schools to take over the failed school to see if they can do a better job. Fifty-seven percent supported school vouchers to allow students in failing schools to attend a private school. Only 43% said the schools should remain under the control of the local school board and allow it to continue to work on the problems.

CABL believes these findings are important, because one of the state's next major education challenges is to find ways to improve schools that consistently do a poor job of educating students. "The results show voters are concerned about the fate of children in failed schools and are willing to explore new and creative options to ensure these students a better chance to succeed," said Stephanie Desselle, CABL Senior Vice President.

Orleans Voters on New Orleans Public Schools: Do Something Different!

As part of our effort to gauge voter attitudes on public education issues, CABL conducted additional research in Orleans Parish to get a scientifically valid sample of voters there. We did this because it is the largest school district in the state, and as such, has a major impact on all of Louisiana. It is also the poorest performing school district in the state (see attached chart), home to 22 of the state's 24 academically unacceptable schools, and a district where most of its other schools still perform below the state average. Because of this, CABL wanted to hear specifically from the citizens of New Orleans about school performance issues.

The survey results show voters are clearly dissatisfied with the way schools in Orleans Parish are managed and the overall performance of public education in general. When asked to consider other options for managing the school system only 28% favored leaving the school system as it is now. As for other options, voters were split on whether the district should be broken down into smaller districts as some have suggested, and expressed only modest interest in a school board appointed by either the state or the mayor.

This is not surprising since the community is only beginning to explore other management options and no consensus has emerged among community leaders. **"One thing is very clear," said Erwin. "Voters are not satisfied with the current situation and are extremely open to change."** It is interesting to note, that in a CABL survey of Orleans Parish voters in the fall of 2001, citizens gave the local school board a grade of D-plus for its performance, lower than the previous city hall leadership and the police department. The current survey suggests the level of dissatisfaction with the school board remains high and voters are frustrated with the current leadership of local schools.

Not surprisingly, voters in Orleans Parish also have significant concerns about the quality of public education being offered to students. In the Orleans survey, 36% of voters say public schools have actually gotten worse over the last five years, and 40% say they have stayed the same. Together that means 76% of voters are seeing no improvement in their public schools. Because the status quo represents the state's poorest performing school district, this is extremely significant.

At the same time, voters do support ongoing efforts at the state level to improve their public schools. Sixty-eight percent of voters in Orleans Parish support Louisiana's school accountability program, with virtually no difference between white voters (69%) and African-Americans (68%). A total of 62% of voters in Orleans also support the high-stakes LEAP tests. In this case, there is a more noticeable racial split, but a significant majority of African-American voters (56%) continue to express support. Seventy-two percent of white voters favor the tests.

There is also widespread support in Orleans for an outside group – universities, the state or others with a track record in education – to take over the district's failed schools. Sixty-six percent favor this option, compared with 45% who would favor sending students to private schools with vouchers, and only 41% who would leave the schools with the local school board.

Interestingly, while there was significant support across racial lines for some entity other than the school board to take over failed schools, 51% of African-Americans favored the school voucher option to help students in low-performing schools, compared with just 35% among whites.

What Does All This Mean for New Orleans and the State?

The results of the Orleans Parish Survey present difficult and important challenges to state policymakers, including legislators, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the governor. **“The overarching question is, how do we improve the largest school district in the state – one that has the lowest performance in the state and has been a chronic failure to its children – while the local school board faces a crisis of confidence among the electorate,” Desselle said.**

While the results of CABL's research do not indicate a clear answer as to who should govern the local schools, they do show that Orleans Parish citizens want something to change with their school board. Citizens strongly believe that groups other than the school board should be given a chance to improve the performance of failed schools, and they want children in these schools to have better opportunities to succeed academically, and later in life.

This survey strongly suggests that it is time for state lawmakers and education policymakers to begin seriously exploring options for failed schools anywhere they exist – but especially in New Orleans where the vast majority are located. “These results support the efforts of local leaders to bring this subject to the forefront of public discussion and seek consensus in the New Orleans community for addressing this serious situation,” Erwin said.

CABL believes this is a critical moment where politics must be set aside, in order to make the views of citizens and the needs of children of paramount concern. This is not simply a “New Orleans issue,” as some would call it, but one that confronts our entire state and its standings in education. As such, it is a matter all must focus on, and one we must all work together to solve.

Ed Renwick of New Orleans conducted this survey for CABL. The statewide survey was conducted September 17-24, 2002 of 600 registered voters. It has a margin of error of +/- 4.1%. The Orleans over sample was conducted September 23- October 3, 2002 of 400 registered voters. It has a margin of error of +/- 5%. CABL is a nonprofit, nonpartisan statewide organization working on issues in the public interest. For more information contact Barry Erwin or Stephanie Desselle at (225) 344-2225.

PASSING RATES* ON STATE L.E.A.P. TESTS
2001-2002 School Year + Summer School

(Includes post-summer school remediation students who have re-taken the test.)

SELECTED PARISHES	4 th Grade LEAP Test		8 th Grade LEAP Test	
	English/Language Arts	Math	English/Language Arts	Math
STATEWIDE AVERAGE	92%	87%	91%	77%
URBAN				
Caddo	91%	84%	90%	71%
Calcasieu	97%	93%	99%	88%
East Baton Rouge	93%	86%	93%	71%
Jefferson	93%	88%	91%	79%
Lafayette	94%	90%	95%	87%
Ouachita	97%	95%	97%	89%
Rapides	97%	90%	94%	79%
Orleans	78%	66%	70%	47%
RURAL - HIGHEST POVERTY				
East Carroll	90%	87%	75%	50%
East Feliciana	92%	87%	82%	65%
Red River	77%	69%	93%	81%
Tensas	77%	71%	84%	62%

* The passing rate standard on 4th and 8th grade L.E.A.P Tests is below the “Basic” proficiency standard for each grade. Louisiana’s passing rate is set at the “Approaching Basic” standard.

Source: LA Department of Education, L.E.A.P. 21 Summary Report, October 2002

STATEWIDE SURVEY LOUISIANA VOTERS

1. In recent years, the state has made efforts to improve Louisiana's public education system. How would you **describe public schools in general right now?**

Opinion	Total	Whites	Black
Greatly improving	7%	7%	6%
Improving somewhat	48%	45%	55%
Not improving	24%	27%	16%
Getting worse	16%	14%	20%
Don't Know/Ref.	6%	7%	2%

2. As you may know, Louisiana has implemented a new **accountability program for public schools**. Its goal is to improve student achievement by grading schools based on their performance, rewarding schools that do well, helping those that perform poorly, and taking away state approval to operate if they fail to improve. From what you know about the school accountability program do you support it or oppose it?

Opinion	Total	Whites	Black
Support	69%	70%	68%
Oppose	19%	17%	24%
Don't Know/Ref.	12%	14%	7%

3. As you may know, the state of Louisiana gives the **LEAP test to every fourth and eighth grader** to make sure they have adequate knowledge and skills before they move onto the next grade. Please tell me if you support or oppose these tests.

Opinion	Total	Whites	Black
Favor	72%	77%	58%
Oppose	23%	17%	38%
Don't Know/Ref.	5%	6%	4%



4. Schools where a very large percentage of the students fail the state’s LEAP tests are referred to as failed schools. If a **failed school** has had four years to show improvement, and is still performing at an unacceptable level, would you favor or oppose any of these **options**? Would you favor or oppose:

<u>OPINION</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>FAVOR</u>		<u>Total</u>	<u>OPPOSE</u>	
		<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>		<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>
Allowing others to take over the failed school, such as local universities, the state or other groups that have a track record of operating schools, to see if they can do a better job.	76%	78%	71%	17%	16%	20%
Offering students in failed schools a publicly funded voucher to allow them to attend a private or parochial school.	57%	56%	61%	33%	34%	31%
Leaving the failed school under the control of the local school board and allowing the board to continue working to solve the school’s problems.	43%	43%	45%	48%	48%	46%

Gender:	Male 46.1%	Female 53.9%	
Race:	White/Hispanic 70.8%	Black 29.2%	
Party:	Democrat 60.3%	Republican 21.7%	Independent 12.2%
	Don’t know/refused 5.8%		
Education:	< than High School 13.5%	High School 34.6%	Some College 23.6%
	College Graduate 27.2%	Don’t Know/Refused 1.2%	

ORLEANS PARISH VOTERS SURVEY

1. As you may know, some in New Orleans have raised questions about **whether the Orleans Parish School Board is doing a good job**. As a result, some are looking at other ways to manage the public schools in New Orleans. Please tell me if you favor or oppose the following suggestions:

<u>OPINION</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>FAVOR</u>		<u>Total</u>	<u>OPPOSE</u>	
		<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>		<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>
Instead of having one large school district as we do now, divide the city into several districts with each having its own school board and its own superintendent of schools.	51%	44%	55%	40%	45%	38%
Change to a school board appointed by the mayor	27%	25%	29%	63%	64%	62%
Change to a school board appointed by the state	32%	29%	34%	58%	59%	58%
Leave the system the same as it is now.	28%	18%	34%	66%	73%	61%

2. In the past five years, do you think **public schools in New Orleans** have gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?

<u>Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Whites</u>	<u>Black</u>
Gotten Better	15%	9%	19%
Gotten Worse	36%	35%	36%
Stayed the Same	40%	44%	38%
Don't Know/Ref.	9%	12%	7%

3. As you may know, Louisiana has implemented a new **accountability program for public schools**. Its goal is to improve student achievement by grading schools based on their performance, rewarding schools that do well, helping those that perform poorly, and taking away state approval to operate if they fail to improve. From what you know about Louisiana's school accountability program do you support it or oppose it?

<u>Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Whites</u>	<u>Black</u>
Support	68%	69%	68%
Oppose	17%	16%	18%
Don't Know/Ref.	15%	16%	14%

4. As you may know, the state of Louisiana gives the **LEAP test to every fourth and eighth grader** to make sure they have adequate knowledge and skills before they move onto the next grade. Please tell me if you support or oppose these tests.

<u>Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Whites</u>	<u>Black</u>
Support	62%	72%	56%
Oppose	34%	24%	40%
Don't Know/Ref.	4%	4%	4%

5. Schools where a very large percentage of the students fail the state's LEAP tests are referred to as **failed schools**. If a failed school has had four years to show improvement, and is still performing at an unacceptable level, would you favor or oppose any of these **options**?

<u>OPINION</u>	<u>FAVOR</u>			<u>OPPOSE</u>		
	<u>Total</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>
Allowing others to take over the failed school, such as local universities, the state or other groups that have a track record of operating schools, to see if they can do a better job.	66%	76%	60%	29%	18%	35%
Offering students in failed schools a publicly funded voucher to allow them to attend a private or parochial school.	45%	35%	51%	47%	54%	43%
Leaving the failed school under the control of the local school board and allowing the board to continue working to solve the school's problems.	41%	28%	49%	49%	62%	42%

Gender:	Male 42.1%	Female 57.9%	
Race:	White/Hispanic 37.9%	Black 62.1%	
Party:	Democrat 61.6%	Republican 13.1%	Independent 14.1%
	Don't know/refused 11.1%		
Education:	< than High School 10.4%	High School 23.5%	Some College 18.3%
	College Graduate 44.3%	Don't Know/Refused 3.5%	

Ed Renwick of New Orleans conducted this survey for CABL. The statewide survey was conducted September 17-24, 2002 of 600 registered voters. It has a margin of error of +/- 4.1%. The Orleans Parish over-sample was conducted September 23- October 3, 2002 of 400 registered voters. It has a margin of error of +/- 5%.