Absences blamed for one third of failures

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A quarter of the grades given to local public high school students in six basic courses in the fall were F's, with a third of those F's going to students with more than 10 unexcused absences, according to a report prepared for the School Board.

The report considered the number of F's in English I, algebra I, geometry, civics, geography and science, and the percentage of those F's attributable to excessive absences.

The students who failed because they cut school, skipped on average 30-35 classes without excuses, the F's resulted from poor attendance.

- Geography — 20 percent failed, and 30 percent of the F's resulted from poor attendance.
- Science — 26 percent failed, and 31 percent of the F's resulted from poor attendance.

A breakdown of middle school failures was not included in the report.

"You can't teach them if they're not there . . ." Trahan said, but added, "We need to find another way to do it in which we don't penalize students" who cannot attend school but who are not abusing the rules.

The report also lists the number of teachers at each middle and high school who gave F's and D's to more than a quarter of their students during the fall semester.

At the middle school level, the number of teachers who gave more than 25 percent of their students poor grades ranged from 6 at Glasgow to 29 at Central.

At the high school level, the number ranged from one at Baton Rouge Magnet to 52 at Glen Oaks, 53 at Belaire and 54 at Baker. Up to 80 percent of students in some classes got D's and F's.

That portion of the report does not identify teachers. It also does not mention the number of teachers at each school, the subjects in which the D's and F's were given or the number of children taught by each teacher.

A Morning Advocate study last week of grades in four basic subjects at each level for the first semester showed 35 percent of the grades given in middle schools and half of the grades given in high schools were D's and F's.

The report makes no attempt to explain the high number of poor grades doled out in public middle and high schools in the parish, other than to say that about a third of high school failures are related to excessive absenteeism.

Director of Instruction Flo Cook could not be reached Monday because she was preparing material for a board member, her secretary said.

However, the report includes copies of letters that Cook has sent to all middle and high school principals, in which she asked them to hold conferences "with teachers who had 25 percent or more failures and/or a high percentage of D's" to find out why students aren't performing, how the teachers are teaching and how the principal and central office could help.

"Many of you have shared with me what you are doing at the school level and I believe that with the additional strategies and assistance we are providing from the central office level, we will improve the achievement performance of our students," Cook said in the letters.