Voters rate schools better than in ’81

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The report card for public schools in Louisiana has improved in the past year, but one out of every two registered voters still gives local schools no better than a “C” average, according to a poll commissioned by the Morning Advocate and State-Times.

The worst report card for public schools anywhere in the state was returned by voters in the four-parish New Orleans metropolitan area. The New Orleans results show 65 percent of the persons responding to the poll rated their public schools as having a grade of “C” or below on the traditional scale of “A” to “F.”

In the 10-parish Baton Rouge metropolitan area, exactly 50 percent of the citizens polled rated the public schools “C” or below.

For purposes of the poll, the Baton Rouge area included East Baton Rouge, West Baton Rouge, Ascension, Iberville, Pointe Coupee, Livingston, West Feliciana, East Feliciana, St. Helena and Tangipahoa parishes.

The poll was conducted by Brady and Associates Inc. A total of 1,055 Louisiana voters from the state’s 64 parishes were questioned on a variety of topics during the period of Nov. 29 to Dec. 6, 1982. The poll results have a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points.

According to statewide results — with 11 percent of the persons polled having no opinion — public schools received the following marks:

- An “A” average: 14 percent said the public schools are doing a topnotch job.
- A “B” average: 26 percent of the respondents placed public schools in this category.
- A “C” average: 27 percent of the persons polled gave their school system this passing mark.
- A “D” average: 12 percent rated

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The public schools are failing. An “F” average: 10 percent of the respondents said public schools are failing. Despite the relatively poor marks, the grades are still better than in the 1981 poll. That year, 64 percent of the respondents across the state rated their public schools “C” or below and 14 percent rated the school systems as failing. This year, 49 percent rated public schools “C” or below and only 10 percent said they’re failing.

This year’s poll shows that the better educated and more affluent respondents were more likely to find fault with the public schools.

A total of 57 percent of persons polled who were college educated gave public schools “C” or lower marks. Thirteen percent of the college-educated respondents said public schools are failing.

A total of 62 percent of the respondents with incomes over $40,000 per year gave public schools a grade of “C” or below. Fifteen percent of these affluent respondents said their public schools are failing. In the category of citizens earning less than $10,000 per year, only 36 percent gave public schools a grade of “C” or below and only six percent said public schools are failing.

Non-whites and citizens earning below $10,000 per year were the most likely to give public schools an “A.” Twenty-three percent of the non-whites gave public schools the highest mark, as opposed to only 12 percent of the whites polled. A total of 21 percent of the respondents earning less than $10,000 per year gave public schools an “A.”

According to the survey results, one-third of the voters responding to the poll have children in the public schools now or had children who attended public school at some point within the past two years.

About 11 percent of the persons in this category have sent their children from public to private schools in the last two years.

Parents most likely to have sent their children to private schools are white, under 50 years of age and are in the middle to upper income brackets, the poll shows.

The predominating reason for transferring a child to a private school is parents’ belief that a child can get a higher quality education there, according to the poll. A total of 44 percent of the respondents who have sent their children to private school gave that as their reason.

An additional 25 percent said they switched primarily because of busing,” the poll added. Also, 15 percent of the respondents said they sent their children to private schools for stricter discipline.

In comparison with the rest of the state, the Baton Rouge area has the highest percentage of parents who have either transferred their children to private schools in the last two years or have a child on a private school waiting list.

Twelve percent of the Baton Rouge area respondents who had children in public schools at some point in the past two years said they have now sent the youngsters to private schools and an additional 5 percent said their children are on a private school waiting list.

On another educational topic, most voters polled in the state believe public school teachers should not be allowed to go out on strike.

A total of 54 percent of the poll respondents statewide said teachers shouldn’t be able to strike and only 39 percent said teachers should be able to walk off their jobs. Seven percent had no opinion on the issue.

Sentiment in support of allowing teachers to strike was highest among younger voters, those who are single, liberals and those with ties to organized unions, the poll shows.

Opposition to teacher strikes was stiffer among older respondents, those who earn more than $40,000 per year, Republicans and other political conservatives.

On a geographical basis, north Louisiana respondents were the most staunchly opposed to teacher strikes with 62 percent saying teachers shouldn’t be allowed to walk off their jobs. The highest percentage of respondents — 44 percent — who said teachers should have the right to strike was found in the Baton Rouge area.

East Baton Rouge Parish went through a teachers’ strike three years ago.