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La. Voters Rank Education, Jobs Top Concerns in Latest SMOR Survey

BATON ROUGE, La. – State government’s top priorities in 2012 should be improving education and jobs creation, according to Southern Media & Opinion Research Inc.’s latest survey of Louisiana voters.

When asked the main problem for Gov. Bobby Jindal and state lawmakers, 25 percent of respondents said education, while 22 percent said jobs and unemployment.

Survey results show widespread dissatisfaction with public education in Louisiana. Eighty percent of respondents gave the state’s progress on public schools a letter grade of C or lower, and nearly 90 percent said they support changes that would require tenured teachers to undergo periodic approval to keep their status.

Developed and conducted by Southern Opinion & Media Research, the poll included telephone interviews with 601 randomly selected Louisiana voters from Nov. 28-Dec. 4. The overall margin of error is plus or minus 4.0 percentage points at a 95 percent level of confidence.

Among the findings:

- Asked to grade public education in general, 36 percent of respondents gave it a C, while 29 percent gave a D and 13 percent gave an F. Only 4 percent gave public education an A.
- 26 percent said the quality of public education is getting better; 31 percent said it’s getting worse; 41 percent said it’s staying the same.
- 53 percent were somewhat or very dissatisfied with public schools in their own parish compared to 14 percent who are very satisfied. African-Americans were most dissatisfied.
- 67 percent said they support Gov. Bobby Jindal’s plan to reform public K-12 education in Louisiana.



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- African-Americans did not see much progress when it comes to creating new jobs. Fifty-three percent of those respondents gave the state a grade of D or F. Among Republicans, 47 percent gave an A or B.
- When asked to grade the state's progress on spending tax dollars to fix problems, 33 percent gave a D or F. The harshest grades came from African-Americans, about 50 percent of whom gave a D or F. Twenty percent of all respondents gave an A or B.

This survey was funded by Lane Grigsby in an effort to share the thoughts of the electorate with Louisiana elected officials. Grigsby has committed to underwriting a Louisiana voter survey biannually. For more information and to view the complete survey results, visit www.laplaintalk.com.

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Southern Media & Opinion Research Winter 2011 Survey Analysis

Education major concern

When respondents were asked to name the main problem for Gov. Bobby Jindal and the incoming Legislature to work on, education was the most common response at 25 percent. At 22 percent, employment was a close second followed by economic development, the state economy and business issues. Education topped the list among Democratic respondents both African-American and white.

Education letter grades

Respondents were asked to assign letter grades – A, B, C, D or F – on progress regarding education and several related issues. Forty-one percent gave progress on education a D or F, while 39 percent gave it a C. Seventeen percent gave a B, and a mere 3 percent gave an A. African-American respondents were the harshest graders with 53 percent giving education progress a D or F. Meanwhile, public education in general isn't highly regarded among numerous demographics. The most frequent grade for the system overall was C among 36 percent of all respondents, followed by 29 percent who gave a D and an F among 13 percent. Only 4 percent gave public education an A.

Public education in their own parish

Respondents are slightly more likely to give passing grades to public schools in their own parishes. African-Americans, however, generally give local public schools lower grades – a C from 36 percent and a D or F from 37 percent. Forty-one percent of white respondents give local public schools an A or B, while only 27 percent of African-Americans gave an A or B.

Direction of public education statewide

Why did incumbent BESE members lose re-election by wide margins to so-called reform candidates? Answering this question underscores the education establishment's growing difficulty in defending the current system. Only 26 percent of survey respondents said the quality of public education is getting better. Thirty-one percent said the quality is getting worse, while 41 percent said it's staying the same.



Direction of local schools

It's not uncommon for local poll results to deviate from the national or state consensus on certain issues. When it comes to Louisiana's school system, however, the winter survey showed respondents are unhappy across the board. Fifty-three percent of respondents were somewhat or very dissatisfied with public schools in their own parish compared to 14 percent who are very satisfied. Again, African-Americans were most dissatisfied. Two thirds of African-American females were somewhat or very dissatisfied with local public education.

Teacher tenure

The winter poll indicates proponents of the current teacher tenure system may have a tough challenge with a looming attempt at reform. Only 11 percent of respondents said teacher tenure should be granted for life. Eighty-eight percent, including overwhelming majorities in every demographic subset, said tenure should be renewed based on a periodic performance-based review.

Other measures of education satisfaction:

- 74 percent of respondents agreed that student progress should be part of teacher evaluations. Every demographic group overwhelmingly agreed with this approach being incorporated into a new statewide teacher evaluation system.
- 81 percent agree that public schools should get letter grades based on student performance.
- 41 percent said there is "a lot" of underperforming public school teachers compared to 34 percent who said there are "some." Less than 1 percent said there are no underperforming teachers.
- 67 percent support Jindal's efforts to reform public schools. While the governor is not overwhelmingly popular among African-American, 50 percent support his education reform efforts.

Other measures of note:

- African-Americans do not see much progress when it comes to creating new jobs. Fifty-three percent of those respondents gave the state a grade of D or F, likely a reflection of unemployment rates that are typically higher than among whites. Among Republicans, 47 percent gave an A or B.
- Three straight years of budget deficits and cuts to education and health care were apparent when respondents were asked to grade the state's use of public money. Thirty-three percent gave a D or F on progress with spending tax dollars to fix problems. African-



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Americans gave the worst grades, with about 50 percent giving a D or F. Twenty percent of all respondents gave an A or B.

- When asked to give a letter grade for progress on ethics reform, 36 percent of respondents gave a C. The New Orleans area received a D or F more frequently than any other area.