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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 27, 2009

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CABL Katrina Poll Reveals Most New Orleans Voters Like Schools' Progress, Don't Want to Go Back to Education As Usual

Voters Have Mixed Views on Other Progress Post-Katrina

BATON ROUGE, LA – A citizen survey by the Council for a Better Louisiana (CABL) taken just before the fourth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina shows most New Orleans voters think public education, civic engagement, flood protection and government hurricane preparedness have improved since the storm struck in 2005, but crime, government corruption and access to health care are worse.

While citizen attitudes were mixed on many of the issues facing the city, there was strong optimism about changes in public education and the emergence of charter schools following the state takeover of all failing public schools in New Orleans after Katrina.

“When it comes to education changes in Orleans Parish since Katrina, the survey shows people here clearly like what they see,” said Bill Hines of New Orleans who serves as CABL chairman. “They recognize that we are making progress, they don’t want to go back to the way things were in the past and they are expressing an optimism about public education in the city that I haven’t seen in my adult lifetime. People have seen education reform and they like it.”

Public Schools – Don't Go Back to the Old Ways

“Because CABL played a leading role in the state takeover of failing schools in New Orleans, we wanted to gauge how people feel about the changes in public education four years after the storm,” said Barry Erwin, CABL President. “An overwhelming majority are pleased with the results.”

When asked if they would prefer to continue with the changes in education since Katrina or go back to the way it was before, 74 percent said continue with the changes and do not go back. In fact, education stands as a strong positive in New Orleans’ recovery efforts. When asked in an open-ended question to list things that are better than they were before Hurricane Katrina, one in four voters named education, which was the number one response.

The survey also revealed strong support for charter schools in New Orleans and the choices that are now available to parents:

- 74 percent of those surveyed support charter schools where a majority of New Orleans public school students are now enrolled,
- 62 percent support converting more traditional public schools into public charter schools, and
- 77 percent like the current system that in most cases allows parents to pick the public school their children will attend as opposed to the school board assigning students to individual schools as was done in the past.

In 2010, the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will consider whether some schools that were taken over by the state should be returned to the Orleans Parish School Board or continue to operate within the Recovery School District. Voters have clear concerns about the idea of returning the schools to the local school board with 45 percent saying the schools should not be returned and 38 percent saying they might be returned over the next several years.

When given information that more seniors are graduating under the current system and fewer schools are failing, the opposition to returning schools to the school board increases with 51 percent saying they should not be returned. “This clearly shows that under any scenario well over 60 percent of voters don’t want schools to go back to the Orleans Parish School Board anytime in the immediate future. It also suggest that if new post-Katrina schools continue to show academic gains like we expect, the opposition to returning schools to the school board will only grow,” said Erwin. “I think this shows that people will want to stick to what’s working.”

Finally, the education section of the survey asked voters about school infrastructure. Roughly a billion dollars will be spent to build new schools and renovate old ones over the next five years. When asked who they trust more to get the job of rebuilding schools done right, 66 percent said the state Recovery School District versus only 13 percent for the Orleans Parish School Board.

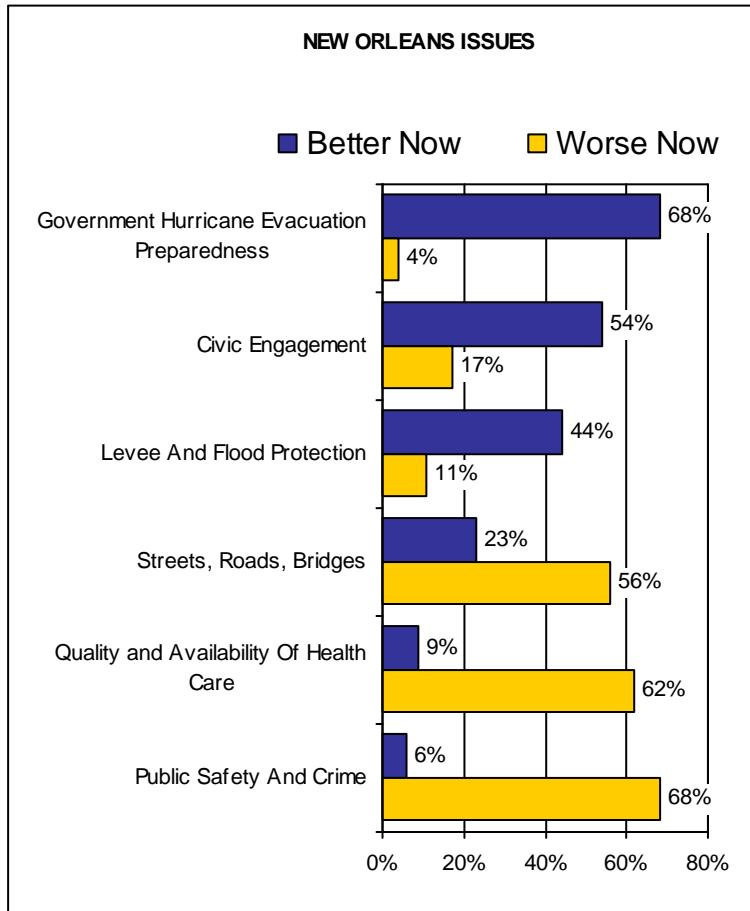
Progress in Other Areas Since Katrina Mixed

CABL also asked citizens about their views on other issues facing the city since Katrina. Overall, a plurality of voters said they feel things in New Orleans are headed in the right direction, with 44 percent saying the city is on the right track and 33 percent saying things are on the wrong track. The poll probed the participants, asking them in open-ended questions to list things that are better and worse than before Katrina.

While the results were varied, the top answers volunteered by participants about what things they think are better since the storm include:

- Schools/education 25 %
- Civic pride or a sense of community 18 %
- Housing/better construction/lower costs 12%

As far as things that are worse than before Katrina, the results indicate a clear consensus. Forty-five percent of participants listed crime and drugs. The next nearest answer was government corruption or a lack of leadership, at 22 percent.



The survey then listed a number of specific issues facing New Orleans and asked participants whether they felt the situation was better or worse with each of them. Results are charted in the accompanying graph.

Generally, citizens feel better about hurricane preparedness, the rise of civic engagement and levees and flood protection.

They fail to see improvement in crime, the quality and availability of health care, and roads and transportation infrastructure.

“It is encouraging, but not surprising that the issue of civic engagement emerged as a strong positive since Katrina,” Hines said. “I think it’s clear the people of New Orleans feel more empowered and involved in what’s going on in the city, even if we’re not all totally satisfied with the results.”

And a strong majority of those who are currently living in New Orleans aren’t going anywhere. When asked about where they plan to be four more years after Katrina, 12 percent said they’ll be living somewhere else, 15 percent are waiting to see progress before deciding, but 69 percent say they plan to stay in New Orleans.

The survey was commissioned by CABL and conducted by pollster Verne Kennedy of Market Research Insight. It surveyed 500 registered voters August 6 – 11 and has a margin of error of 4.5 percent. Demographically 59 percent of participants were African- American and 39 percent Caucasian.

Founded in 1962, CABL works to improve the quality of life for Louisiana citizens by raising awareness of critical issues, promoting sound policy, fostering civic leadership and championing government accountability.

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SURVEY NAME: CABL NEW ORLEANS VOTER SURVEY
SAMPLE SIZE: 500 REGISTERED VOTERS
FIELD DATES: AUGUST 6-11, 2009
JOB NUMBER: 09146

TOPLINES

Hello, my name is _____ with Market Research Insight, a nationally recognized research firm. We do not sell anything. We just conduct various opinion surveys. Tonight, we are surveying New Orleans voters about important issues facing the City.

Just to be sure, are you registered to vote in New Orleans for elections such as Mayor and City Council? (IF NO, POLITELY TERMINATE)

Do you or does anyone in this household work for:

The news media? (IF YES, POLITELY TERMINATE)
An advertising or public relations firm? (IF YES, POLITELY TERMINATE)
A marketing research firm? (IF YES, POLITELY TERMINATE)

1. Overall, would you say that things in New Orleans (pronounced: New Ar-lens) are moving in the right direction and getting better or off on the wrong track and getting worse?

1. DIRECTION OF NEW ORLEANS	
Wrong Track	33%
Staying About The Same	23%
Right Track	44%

2. Regardless of your opinion about the right or wrong direction for New Orleans, what things would you say are better about New Orleans than before the hurricane? (PROBE)

2. THINGS THAT ARE BETTER THAN BEFORE KATRINA	
Schools, Education	25%*
Civic Pride, Sense Of Community, People Care	18%
New Housing, Better Construction, Lower Costs	12%
Government, Planning	10%
Economy, More Stores, New Development City	10%
Looks Better, Clean, Renovated	8%
Traffic, Roads	8%
People Are Returning, New Faces, Younger Crowd	6%
Hurricane Protection, Levees	4%
City Services	2%
Healthcare	1%
Uncertain	15%
Other	6%

* Participants were able to give multiple answers. This number reflects the percentage of respondents who gave a particular answer.

3. Regardless of your opinion about the right or wrong direction for New Orleans, what things would you say are worse about New Orleans than before the hurricane? (PROBE)

3. THINGS THAT ARE WORSE THAN BEFORE KATRINA	
Crime, Drugs	45% *
Government, Corruption, No Leadership	22%
Roads, Traffic	9%
Affordable Housing, Property Values, Taxes	8%
Unemployment, Low Wages	7%
Economy, Cost Of Living, Lack Of Stores	7%
Blighted Property, Need To Clean Up	5%
Schools, Education	5%
Healthcare, Hospitals	5%
City Services	5%
Slow Recovery, Lack Of Funds, Red Tape	5%
Uncertain	4%
Other	3%

* Participants were able to give multiple answers. This number reflects the percentage of respondents who gave a particular answer.

I am going to mention several issues about New Orleans. Please tell me if you think each one is now better, worse or about the same since Katrina. (RANDOM ORDER)

4. Government hurricane evacuation preparedness.

4. GOVERNMENT HURRICANE EVACUATION PREPAREDNESS	
Better Now	68%
About the Same	22%
Worse Now	4%
Undecided	6%

5. Civic engagement with more organizations and people working to improve New Orleans.

5. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	
Better Now	54%
About the Same	25%
Worse Now	17%
Undecided	5%

6. Levee and flood protection.

6. LEVEE AND FLOOD PROTECTION	
Better Now	44%
About the Same	35%
Worse Now	11%
Undecided	11%

7. Streets, roads, bridges.

7. STREETS, ROADS, BRIDGES	
Better Now	23%
About the Same	20%
Worse Now	56%
Undecided	1%

8. The quality and availability of health care.

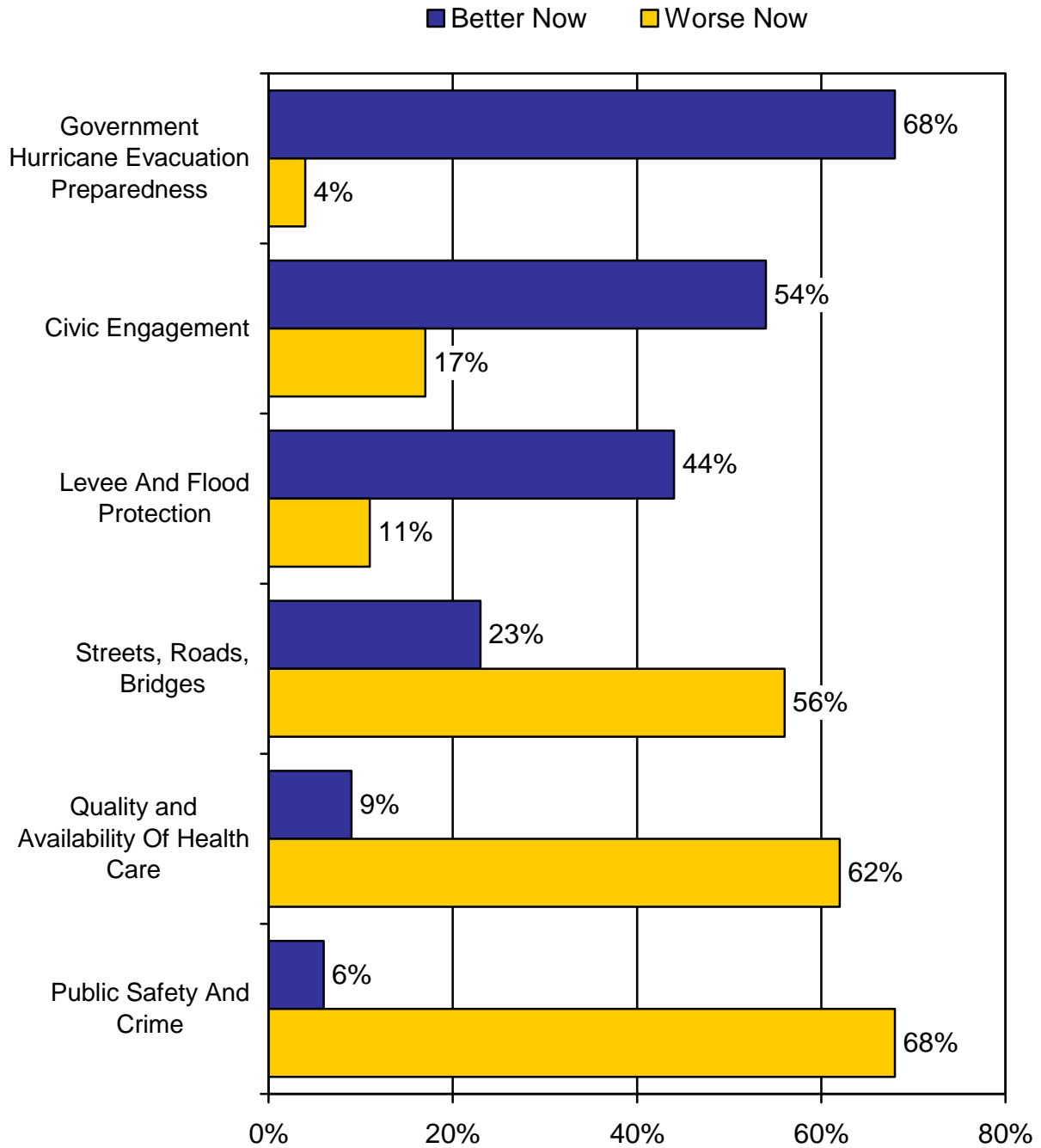
8. QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE	
Better Now	9%
About the Same	25%
Worse Now	62%
Undecided	4%

9. Public safety and crime.

9. PUBLIC SAFETY AND CRIME	
Better Now	6%
About the Same	26%
Worse Now	68%
Undecided	1%

(See graph on following page)

NEW ORLEANS ISSUES



10. Since it has been four years since Katrina, please think of the next four years. In four years do you plan to: still be living in New Orleans, want to live in New Orleans but waiting to see how much progress the City makes, definitely live somewhere else outside of New Orleans?

10. LIVING PLANS IN FOUR YEARS	
Still Be Living In New Orleans	69%
Want To Live In New Orleans But Waiting To See Progress	15%
Definitely Live Somewhere Else	12%
Don't Know	3%

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11. A number of changes in public education have taken place in New Orleans since Katrina. If given a choice, (ROTATE ORDER) would you prefer to continue with the changes in public education since Katrina or go back to the way it was before Katrina?

11. CHANGES IN PUBLIC EDUCATION	
Continue With The Changes In Public Education Since Katrina	74%
Go Back To The Way It Was Before Katrina	12%
Uncertain	14%

12. As you may know, a majority of public school students in New Orleans now attend public charter schools. Charter schools are independent public schools that operate with freedom from many of the regulations that apply to traditional public schools. Given this information, do you support or oppose charter schools?

12. CHARTER SCHOOLS	
Oppose	10%
Support	74%

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13. Do you support or oppose converting more traditional public schools into public charter schools?

13. CONVERTING MORE TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS INTO PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS	
Oppose	15%
Support	62%

14. Public school students in New Orleans are no longer assigned to a particular school. Parents can choose what school their child will attend, and the school provides free transportation. Which approach do you prefer: (ROTATE ORDER) parents picking a school or students assigned to a school?

14. PREFERRED APPROACH TO SCHOOL ASSIGNMENT	
Parents Picking A School	77%
Students Assigned To A School	15%
Uncertain	9%

15. In 2010, the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will consider whether state officials should return schools to the Orleans Parish School Board or continue to operate them within the Recovery School District in New Orleans. Which of the following do you prefer:

15. PREFERRED METHOD FOR RETURNING SCHOOLS TO THE ORLEANS PARISH SCHOOL BOARD	
Return Schools In The Next Year Or Two	21%
Return Schools In The Next Three To Five Years	17%
Not Return Schools At All	45%
Uncertain	18%

16. Since the state took over all of the failing schools after Katrina, student test scores in New Orleans have improved. More seniors are graduating and fewer schools are failing. Knowing this information, which of the following do you prefer state officials to do:

16. PREFERRED METHOD FOR RETURNING SCHOOLS KNOWING THEY HAVE IMPROVED	
Return Schools In The Next Year Or Two	18%
Return Schools In The Next Three To Five Years	17%
Not Return Schools At All	51%
Uncertain	13%

17. A billion dollars will be spent to build new schools and renovate old ones in the next five years. Who do you trust more to get this job done right (ROTATE ORDER) the Orleans Parish School Board or the State Recovery School District?

17. TRUST MORE TO BUILD NEW SCHOOLS AND RENOVATE OLD ONES	
The Orleans Parish School Board	13%
The State Recovery School District	66%
Uncertain	21%

Thank you, that completes the opinion section of the survey. Now, a few questions for demographic purposes and we'll be finished.

18. What is your age? (RECORD ACTUAL AGE)

18. VOTER AGE	
18-34 Years	12%
35-44 Years	22%
45-54 Years	18%
55-64 Years	24%
65 Years & Older	23%

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19. What is the highest level of education you have obtained to date?

19. EDUCATION BACKGROUND	
Less Than High School	5%
High School Graduate	21%
Some College	24%
College Graduate	23%
Technical Degree	2%
Associate Degree	4%
Post Graduate	19%
Refused	2%

20. Do you have a child in a public school? (IF NO, CONTINUE WITH...) Do you have a relative or close friend with a child in public schools?

20. HAVE OR KNOW A CHILD IN PUBLIC SCHOOL	
Yes	69%
No	31%

21. Approximately, what is your household's total, annual income? When I read the correct category, just tell me.

21. ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
Under \$20,000	25%
\$20,000-\$39,999	23%
\$40,000-\$59,999	24%
\$60,000-\$79,999	12%
\$80,000-\$99,999	5%
\$100,000 & Over	11%

22. And, your gender is male or female? (CONTINUE WITH...) Are you employed outside of the home?

22. GENDER AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS	
Employed Male	28%
Not Employed Male	13%
Employed Female	28%
Not Employed Female	31%

23. In addition to being American, what do you consider to be your main ethnic background?

23. ETHNIC	
African-American	59%
Ethnic Majority	39%
Hispanic	2%
Other	0%

This concludes our survey. Thank you for your time.