

Schools should stress job skills, parents say

By Wayne Peal
staff writer

Michigan residents want changes in public education — but they want them for adults and older students more than for children.

No doubt reflecting the slumping economy, 61 percent of those who responded to this year's Michigan Education Poll said that job skills should also be a top educational priority.

Nearly two-thirds said schools should make adult reading skills a top priority. Lesser percentages listed college preparation (37 percent) and pre-school education (15 percent) as key goals.

"If YOU look at schools, it (support) almost goes from the oldest group to the

youngest group," said former state Sen. William Sederberg, who conducted the poll for Lansing-based Public Sector Consultants, Inc.

While 41 percent of those polled said they favored substantial or radical change in the state public education system, most nonetheless gave good grades to their local schools.

Local schools were given an A by 11 percent of those who responded, the highest percentage in the past decade. Overall, 83 percent gave their schools a grade of C or better.

State Board of Education President Dorothy Beardmore warned, however, that the good grades could actually be a roadblock to the kind of changes being sought.

"ONE OF the biggest problems is that

there's too much satisfaction from adults," the Rochester resident said. "There's the feeling that we need change, but our local schools are just fine."

Despite the generally good grades, Beardmore said local school boards should take survey results seriously. Opinions were taken from 800 Michigan residents, nearly 40 percent from Detroit suburbs. Among the findings:

- More than three in every five respondents favor "schools of choice" — letting students choose any schools they wish within their local district. Less than half would allow students to choose schools in other districts. That figure shot up to 62 percent, however, if students would attend programs in private and church-related schools.
- Other widely-approved changes in-

cluded extending the school year to 200 days (61 percent), student skill guarantees (59 percent) and bonus pay for proficient teachers (58 percent). Charter schools — letting teachers form their own schools — only received 32 percent support, though Sederberg acknowledged it was the least publicized of the reforms proposed by the survey.

Despite the call for change, respondents were loath to raise taxes. Fewer than 20 percent would approve schools of choice, guaranteed skills, bonus pay or an extended school year if it meant a tax increase. Nearly 60 percent disagreed that more spending would improve test scores.

The overall call for change was greatest among Detroit residents: 16 percent favored abolishing the local district outright, while 52 percent called for substantial change.

In contrast, only five percent of suburbanites would abolish their local schools. Still, 37 percent said they favored substantial change.

Not surprisingly, parents with children in public classrooms saw a cooler future for public education than those who send their children to private schools.

A third of public school parents saw their local schools getting better, compared with 17 percent of those who send their children elsewhere. At the same time, 18 percent of public school parents, and 24 percent of private school parents, saw their local public schools getting worse.

Respondents were evenly divided between males and females. The margin of error was plus or minus 3.7 percent on any answer.

Due to state budget-cutting, this year's survey was underwritten by the Upjohn Co.

County medical society elects officers

Four new officers were recently installed at the Annual Meeting of the 1,470 physician-member Oakland County Medical Society (OCMS) held at the Troy Marriott Hotel.

Dr. Harm Kraai succeeds Dr. Clayton Gordon as president of the

professional organization. Kraai is a urologist with a practice in Pontiac.

Dr. Kenneth Giffin will serve for a year as the president-elect of the OCMS. Giffin is an orthopedic surgeon with offices in Southfield and West Bloomfield.

Dr. David Harold was elected as

secretary of the medical society. Harold has a urology practice in Pontiac.

New treasurer of the Oakland County Medical Society is Dr. Ralph Coskey. Coskey is a dermatologist with an office in Farmington.

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