

of Educators (NCAE), agree that the state's public school system is meriting higher levels of support. "Approval ratings have gone in a positive direction in the last five years," Borst says. "Across North Carolina, most communities are very proud of their schools."

Still, Borst also recognizes and acknowledges the critics of the state's education efforts. "Is there

room for improvement? Absolutely. Is it abysmal? Absolutely not," Borst remarks. "There is great hope and energy in the state around our schools." Borst's view is supported by spring 2000 poll numbers showing that 62.1 percent of North Carolinians believe that to improve the public school system, the focus should be on reforming the existing system.³³

—continues on page 89

Support for the Public Schools in Polls: North Carolina Versus the Nation

For the much of the past decade, polling organizations in the state and nation have probed the public mind in an effort to gauge support for the public schools. The typical format is to have respondents grade the schools, much as respondents were graded by their teachers in grade school and beyond. A standard question is this: "Students are often are given the grades A, B, C, D, and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools, themselves, in this community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the schools here?"

How do North Carolina residents grade their schools compared to the rest of the nation? The results of polls taken in the same year statewide and nationally make possible a direct comparison.

As the numbers below indicate, North Carolina trailed the nation in 1993, with 47 percent of poll respondents giving their local public schools A's and B's nationally, compared to 44 percent at the state level. But by 1997, as the state became increasingly focused on public school reform, North Carolina's numbers had surpassed those of the nation as a whole, with 49 percent of N.C. respondents giving A's and B's compared to 46 percent nationally. The gap widened in 2000, with 52 percent of North Carolina respondents awarding A's and B's, compared to 47 percent nationally. Thus, the poll numbers support the notion that North Carolinians think more of their public schools than does the nation as a whole.

—Mike McLaughlin

	1993		1997		2000	
	A's&B's	C,D,F	A's&B's	C,D,F	A's&B's	C,D,F
National answer (%)	47	46	46	49	47	46
N.C. answer (%)	44	52	49	37	52	38

Bold type indicates higher percentage when respondents awarding an A or B are combined.

Source: 1993 national data from the Gallup Organization for Phi Delta Kappa as reported in "Report Card for the Nation's Schools," *The Polling Report*, Washington, D.C., Oct. 11, 1993, p. 2. National data for 1997 and 2000 also are reprinted from *The Polling Report* (Sept. 1997, p. 1, Oct. 21, 2000, p. 1). North Carolina data were taken from data archives at the University of North Carolina's Institute for Research in Social Science. See "What Do Polls Show North Carolinians Think about North Carolina Public Schools?" p. 86, for a more detailed description of these in-state polls.