States Need Assistance to More Effectively Carry Out Requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act

Staffing and Funding Levels Insufficient to Support Efforts to Improve Student Achievement

WASHINGTON – May 10, 2007 – Since passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, the responsibilities of state education agencies have significantly increased but most states don’t have the capacity to meet those new demands, which undermines their ability to successfully implement reform efforts, according to a new report from the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Education Policy.

In a national survey of education officials in all 50 states and in-depth interviews with high ranking education officials in 11 states conducted for the report in late 2006 and early 2007, the Center finds that state education agencies have been stymied by a lack of adequate funding, manpower, and technology.

And the problem seems most pervasive in states with high percentages of schools (26 percent or more) that missed targets for adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the law, which generally reported having more capacity challenges in implementing NCLB than states with lower percentages of these schools.

In the survey, states cite insufficient numbers of staff as the greatest challenge to their capacity to implement NCLB requirements, including requirements to provide technical assistance to districts with low-achieving schools, to monitor these districts, and to determine the effectiveness of supplemental education services.

Inadequate federal funding was also identified by a majority of states as a major problem. In fact, 32 states reported that federal Title I funds have been insufficient to improve student achievement in low-achieving schools, while only 10 states reported that these funds were sufficient. In addition, half of the states surveyed said that inadequate federal funds challenged their capacity to monitor supplemental service providers “to a great extent,” while 82 percent (41 states) said that inadequate federal funds challenged their capacity to provide technical assistance to districts with schools either “moderately” or “to a great extent.”

The report, Educational Architects: Do State Education Agencies Have the Tools Necessary to Implement NCLB?, also finds that only 11 states report that they have been
able to provide technical assistance to districts with low-achieving schools “to a great extent,” an issue that many states are worried could grow in the future.

“The ability of state education agencies to operate effectively will make or break reform efforts,” said Jack Jennings, president and CEO of CEP. “Their role in improving schools must be clearly defined and they should receive the guidance and support necessary to implement federal requirements – something that many say they are not getting now.”

The survey finds that most states also report that guidance from the U.S. Department of Education in implementing the requirements of No Child Left Behind was not very helpful, particularly when focused on supplemental educational services. Only two states found the department’s guidance on implementing systems to monitor supplemental services “very helpful,” while 15 found it “not at all” helpful.

The issue of state capacity is fundamental to the implementation of state and federal reform strategies, because if state education agencies are ineffective, the policies will fail, the report warns. To delineate the roles of state education agencies and ensure they operate at optimal capacity, the Center on Education Policy has included several key recommendations in the report, including:

• When NCLB is reauthorized, the law should include a grant program for states to rethink the mission and organization of state education agencies to make them more effective leaders of school improvement;

• Additional federal funding should be provided to enable state education agencies to effectively carry out NCLB;

• The U.S. Department of Education should review and enhance its efforts to assist state education agencies in implementing federal programs, including the department’s application and reporting procedures and guidance and regulations; and

• The reauthorized NCLB Act should be amended to help states assist schools more effectively, by allowing states to provide differentiated levels of technical assistance to schools in improvement based on the severity of an individual school’s problems.

The report is part of the Center’s ongoing efforts to assess the federal, state, and local implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act. Throughout 2007, CEP will release additional new research on the implementation of the federal education law as part of the series From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 5 of the No Child Left Behind Act.

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Based in Washington, D.C. and founded in January 1995, by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent any special interests. Instead the Center helps citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.