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Majority of School Leaders Report Gains in Achievement, But a Narrower Curriculum Focus Under No Child Left Behind

NCLB Affecting Everyday Lives of Students & Educators; Greatest Impact in Urban Districts, According to New Report, Survey

WASHINGTON – March 28, 2006 – The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is having a greater impact on the everyday activities of schools and districts, including prompting districts to better align instruction and state standards and more effectively use test data to adjust teaching, according to a report from the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Education Policy, which is tracking federal, state and local implementation of the law. However, the Center also found that a majority of districts surveyed – 71 percent – reported having reduced instructional time in at least one other subject to make more time for reading and mathematics, the topics tested for NCLB purposes.

The report is based on the most comprehensive national study of the impact of NCLB, and comprises an extensive body of original research and analysis, including a survey of education officials in 50 states, a nationally representative survey of 299 school districts, and in-depth case studies in 38 geographically diverse districts and 42 individual schools.

According to state and local officials surveyed, scores on state tests are rising in a large majority of states and school districts, and many school leaders cited NCLB requirements for adequate yearly progress (AYP) as an important factor in rising achievement, though far more credited school district policies and programs as important contributors to these gains. In addition, the vast majority of state and district officials say that the Act's focus on the academic performance of student subgroups is having a positive effect.

The report also notes that officials in several case study districts, as well as some district survey respondents, feel the law has escalated pressure on teachers to a stressful level and is negatively affecting staff morale in some schools.

"The effects of NCLB are complex, and this policy has both strengths and weaknesses," said Jack Jennings, president and CEO of the independent, nonpartisan CEP. "If anyone is looking for a simple judgment on NCLB, such as 'good' or 'bad,' they will not find it in this report."

The report, *From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 4 of the No Child Left Behind Act*, is the fourth in a series of annual reports to be issued through 2008 by CEP, and offers a long-term look at how the law's implementation is affecting states and school districts.

Urban districts appear to be experiencing the greatest effects of the law. According to the report, the majority (54 percent) of Title I schools identified for improvement nationwide are in urban districts—a disproportionate share because only 27 percent of Title I schools are located in urban districts. Altogether, 29 percent of urban Title I schools are in improvement, compared with 11 percent of suburban Title I schools and 6 percent of rural Title I schools. And 90 percent of the schools now in restructuring, the last

stage of NCLB's sanctions, are located in urban districts. Moreover, a greater proportion of urban districts than suburban or rural districts have been identified for district improvement.

A combination of factors has led to this pronounced impact in urban districts, including the fact that many urban districts must demonstrate AYP for 6-10 student subgroups while some rural districts must show progress for only two, white and low-income students. In addition, urban districts tend to be larger, so they have many more schools that must make AYP than smaller districts do; they also enroll higher percentages of low-income students.

Nationwide, the number of schools identified for improvement under NCLB has remained steady, in part due to changes in federal and state rules for testing students and determining adequate yearly progress that have made it easier for some districts and schools to make AYP. The report also finds:

- **Teacher Quality:** The proportion of districts that said they are on track to have all of their academic teachers highly qualified by the end of this school year was similarly high across urban, suburban, and rural districts. Also, for the first time this year, the report finds no significant difference in the percentage of high-minority enrollment districts and lower-minority enrollment districts reporting that all their teachers are highly qualified. Still, a majority of district officials surveyed expressed skepticism that the NCLB teacher requirements are improving the quality of teaching.
- **Tutoring & School Choice:** The number of students taking advantage of key NCLB accountability provisions has changed little over the last few years, according to the report. Currently about 20 percent of all eligible students participate in tutoring programs under NCLB, while less than 2 percent of eligible students are taking advantage of the NCLB choice option to change schools.
- **Goals for Student Proficiency:** Several states and districts question their ability to bring 100 percent of students to the proficient level of achievement by 2014.
- **Subjects Being Reduced:** One-third (33 percent) of school districts reported reducing time for social studies "somewhat or to a great extent" to make time for reading and math, while 29 percent said they had reduced time for science and 22 percent for art and music.

The Continuing Capacity Gap

The Center's survey again finds that the lack of capacity is the greatest NCLB-related challenge for most states and districts. In fact, nearly every state (47) cited providing assistance to all schools identified for improvement as their greatest challenge in implementing NCLB, while 42 states indicated that the size of the state education agency staff presented a serious or moderate challenge to NCLB implementation.

Meanwhile, 37 states said that the adequacy of *state* funds to carry out NCLB duties was a serious or moderate challenge, while 34 said that the adequacy of *federal* funds presented a serious or moderate challenge. In addition, 33 states reported that funds have been inadequate to assist all schools identified for improvement, while 80 percent of school districts said they had costs for NCLB that were not covered by federal funds, such as costs for administering assessments, managing data, and providing professional development to help teachers meet the law's requirements.

The Center's 2005 report on NCLB made eight recommendations for improving the law, four of which were acted on at least partially by the U.S. Department of Education. The Center's current report includes a series of new recommendations for federal action, including:

1. The Department should provide more information to the public about the process for considering state changes to their accountability plans.
2. The Department should monitor and report on how confidence intervals, the safe harbor provision, and similar flexibility provisions are affecting the number of schools and districts making AYP.
3. The Department of Education should move swiftly to help states develop assessments for certain students with disabilities, the so-called "gap children," using modified standards.
4. The Department and the Congress should provide more funding for the act in general.

5. The Department and the Congress should earmark more funding and provide other types of support to help strengthen states' and districts' capacity to assist schools identified for improvement.
6. The Department and the Congress should give states and school districts sufficient authority and resources to monitor and evaluate supplemental educational service providers.
7. The Secretary of Education should use her waiver authority to expand the pilot program that allows some districts to offer supplemental educational services instead of school choice in the first year of improvement and to wait until the second year of improvement to offer choice.
8. The Secretary of Education should use her bully pulpit to signal that social studies, science, the arts, and other subjects beside reading and math are still a vital part of a balanced curriculum.

FROM THE CAPITAL TO THE CLASSROOM: 2006 CASE STUDY DISTRICTS

Alabama, *Calhoun County School District*
Alaska, *Kodiak Island Borough School District*
Arkansas, *Fayetteville Public Schools*
California, *Escondido Union School District*
California, *Grant Joint Union High School District*
California, *Oakland Unified School District*
California, *Palmdale Elementary School District*
California, *Tahoe-Truckee Joint Unified School District*
Colorado, *Colorado Springs School District 11*
Colorado, *Fort Lupton Weld Re-8 School District*
Idaho, *Joint School District #2 – Meridian*
Illinois, *Chicago Public Schools*
Kansas, *Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools*
Louisiana, *St. John the Baptist Parish Public Schools*
Massachusetts, *Avon Public School District*
Massachusetts, *Boston Public Schools*
Michigan, *Flint Community Schools*
Michigan, *Harrison Community Schools*
Michigan, *Willow Run Community Schools*

Minnesota, *Cloquet Independent School District # 94*
Mississippi, *Pascagoula School District*
Missouri, *Hermitage School District*
Nebraska, *Heartland Community Schools*
Nevada, *Clark County School District*
New Jersey, *Bayonne City School District*
New Mexico, *Bloomfield School District*
New York, *Romulus Central Schools*
North Carolina, *Wake County Public School System*
North Dakota, *Napoleon School District*
Ohio, *Cleveland Municipal School District*
Oregon, *Tigard-Tualatin School District*
South Carolina, *Berkeley County School District*
Texas, *Cuero Independent School District*
Vermont, *Marlboro Elementary School*
Vermont, *Orleans Central Supervisory Union*
Virginia, *Waynesboro Public Schools*
Wisconsin, *Sheboygan Area Schools*
Wyoming, *Fremont County School District #1*

<p><i>From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 4 of the No Child Left Behind Act and its case studies are available on the web at www.cep-dc.org.</i></p>
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