The Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center helps 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 and works instead to help citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create the conditions that will lead to better public schools.

During 2008, the Center on Education Policy received support from eleven charitable foundations, including the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, The George Gund Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the C.S. Mott Foundation, the Phi Delta Kappa International Foundation, the Smith Richardson Foundation, and the Spencer Foundation. The statements made and the views expressed in the reports and other work of the Center on Education Policy are solely the responsibility of the Center.

Leadership & Staff

Jack Jennings, President and CEO
Diane Stark Rentner, Director of National Programs
Jennifer McMurrr, Research Associate
Susie Pamudji, Office Manager
Dee Kantaiah, Senior Research Associate
Ying Zhang, Research Associate

Expert Consultants

Naomi Chudowsky Nancy Kober
Victor Chudowsky Brenda Neuman-Sheldon
Elizabeth Duffrin Caitlin Scott
Thomas Fagan Human Resources Research Organization
Maureen Kelleher

Board of Directors

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There is wide agreement that the nation’s future well-being and competitiveness depend on how well its students are being educated. And with more than 90 percent of students in the United States attending public schools, it has become increasingly important for all Americans to better understand how effectively public schools are meeting this challenge.

Although countless studies and reports have chronicled decades of school reform, many education stakeholders—from presidents to principals to parents—still lack the knowledge and information needed to determine the impact of these efforts.

For nearly 15 years, the Center on Education Policy, a national, independent advocate for public schools, has worked to help inform people about the basic facts of public education and its central role in American society. Funded entirely through grants from charitable foundations, the Center has drawn significant attention to the health and the effectiveness of public education with independent, objective analysis of the effects of major school reforms. While the Center has investigated different types of reforms over the years—from cyber schools to private school tuition vouchers—most of its recent research has focused on key aspects of standards-based reform, the predominant approach being used today to improve the nation’s schools.

In 2008, the Center completed a landmark year in its efforts to build understanding of and support for public education with timely and important research on education at every level, from federal and state to district, school, and classroom. Throughout the year, the Center offered policymakers, educators, and the public new insights into the effects of major reform efforts, including the No Child Left Behind Act and the use of state high school exit exams. The Center also continues to offer useful and provocative thinking on the fundamental role and purpose of public schools, as evidenced by the ongoing popularity of two reports from previous years, *A Public Education Primer* and *Do We Still Need Public Schools?*
INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Since 2002, the Center has monitored the implementation and the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act and has published a series of annual reports to communicate its findings widely. This work represents the most comprehensive and continuous investigation of the effects of the law conducted by any group. In addition to indispensable reporting and analysis about student achievement trends and the effect of school restructuring under the law, the Center also tracked the law’s impact in a range of key areas in 2008. These include classroom instruction (Instructional Time in Elementary Schools: A Closer Look at Changes for Specific Subjects), expectations for student achievement (Many States Have Taken a “Backloaded” Approach to the No Child Left Behind Goal of All Students Scoring “Proficient”), rural education (Some Perspectives from Rural School Districts on the No Child Left Behind Act), and federal funding formulas (Title I Funds—Who’s Gaining, Who’s Losing: School Year 2008-09 Update).

ANSWERING THE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT QUESTION

Since the No Child Left Behind Act was signed in 2002, the most important questions surrounding the law have also been the most difficult to answer: has student achievement improved, and have achievement gaps narrowed? In 2008, the Center issued the second of two annual reports intended to help answer those questions.

Has Student Achievement Increased Since 2002? State Test Score Trends Through 2006-07 (June 2008), and its predecessor are built on the most comprehensive independent review of raw test data from all 50 states: an analysis of performance trends on state reading and mathematics tests used to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act and of state-by-state performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The result is an exclusive and revealing summary of overall student achievement since 2002 and achievement gaps between subgroups of students.

In 2008, the Center made available on its Web site all of the raw test data it had collected from the states, as well as a set of state profiles with detailed information on state assessments and achievement trends. This resource—the only collection of state accountability test data from all 50 states—provides a valuable tool for researchers and others monitoring student achievement trends.

EARLY LESSONS OF SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING

School restructuring is the No Child Left Behind Act’s ultimate sanction for persistently failing schools. Since 2004, the Center has investigated how states and school districts have approached school restructuring and what has happened to schools that have undergone the restructuring process.

The Center’s work in 2008 focused on five states—California, Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, and Ohio—that were among the first to see a significant number of schools enter the restructuring process. In addition to issuing annual reports for each of the states, the Center also published a comprehensive report on its findings across all five states for the first time in 2008. The findings of this report can be instructive to other states weighing their own approaches to restructuring, as well as to districts, schools, and public and private organizations involved in school improvement.
In 2008, the Center provided testimony on its findings to an independent oversight agency in California investigating that state’s restructuring efforts. The Center also offered recommendations to the leadership of the District of Columbia Public Schools based on its research and findings in other states.

**ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF ACCOUNTABILITY ON SCHOOLS**

In 2007, the Center issued findings from a survey of more than 350 school districts suggesting that as a majority of elementary schools increased their focus on math and reading, instructional time in other subject areas was being scaled back. To better understand the school-level effects of standards- and test-based accountability efforts, the Center in 2008 sent researchers into classrooms in two states to monitor whether and how instruction and curriculum are changing. The Center’s classroom research, supplemented by surveys and focus groups of teachers, administrators, parents, and students, was reported for these states in *Lessons from the Classroom Level: The Effects of Accountability on Instruction and Curriculum in Rhode Island* (November 2008) and *Lessons from the Classroom Level: The Effects of Accountability on Instruction and Curriculum in Illinois* (December 2008). Together, they provide a window on the effects of federal and state accountability efforts in U.S. classrooms.

**RETHINKING THE FEDERAL ROLE IN EDUCATION**

With major questions surrounding the pending reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act as the Obama Administration takes shape, the Center has launched an effort to reconsider the federal role in elementary and secondary education. In this effort, the Center intends to take a broader and deeper view of the federal government’s ongoing efforts to improve education than debates over various aspects of the No Child Left Behind Act can allow. The Center is taking an evidence-based approach to reviewing the effects of past federal programs in order to determine what the federal government could successfully achieve in the future.

To carry out this project, the Center has commissioned ten papers on broad issues of federal interest, including standards-based reform, teacher quality, and high school reform. The Center has also held public forums on Capitol Hill, where authors of the papers have presented their findings and engaged in open discussion. At the completion of the series of papers and public forums, the Center will issue evidence-based recommendations for revising the federal role in education, including changes to the No Child Left Behind Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

**HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAMS**

By 2012, 74 percent of American high school students and 84 percent of children of color will attend school in states that will require them to pass an exit exam to graduate. The rapid adoption of the tests has been a flashpoint in American education, and states have been vociferously credited or criticized for their use. The stakes are high: public protests have been sparked by significant numbers of students being denied diplomas in some states after having otherwise completed all of the requirements to obtain one. Elsewhere, states have been criticized for introducing alternative routes to a diploma or otherwise “weakening” exit exam programs to avoid high failure rates. For seven years, the Center has monitored the use and effects of exit exams, and in 2008, issued three policy briefs and an annual report on its findings. Chief among the issues studied are the gaps in pass rates for different student subgroups and the significant challenges the tests pose to English language learners and students with disabilities.
The Center’s Agenda for 2009

In 2009, the Center will continue its efforts to report on important changes in public education at a time when the nation will seek answers to a number of key questions: What effect will a new presidential administration and a new Congress have on the future of No Child Left Behind? How might the federal role in education change? What challenges will states, districts, and schools face in carrying out various accountability requirements? What effect will these efforts have on classrooms and student achievement in general?

Based on its current and planned research agenda, the Center will issue a diverse set of reports in 2009 that extend and build on the work it has completed to date. Included in that agenda are the following:

- Continued reporting on various aspects of No Child Left Behind, including an analysis of the distribution of funds under that Act

- Several reports analyzing state and national trends in student test scores, scores for specific subgroups, and achievement gaps for elementary school students, drawing from the Center’s independent analysis of test data from all 50 states

- Reports on school restructuring in California, Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, New York, and Ohio, and a comprehensive report on lessons from restructuring schools in these six states

- Reporting on developments in the use of state high school exit exams, including an annual report in the summer of 2009

- Ongoing reporting on the effects of federal and state accountability on curriculum and instruction, using surveys, classroom observations, and focus groups in several high schools in Washington State. The Center will also issue a report summarizing findings from this research in Illinois, Rhode Island, and Washington
As the Center enters its 15th year, it continues to have a lasting impact on public education in the United States. Over time, much of the Center’s work has been used to help shape, improve, and inform public policy for the greater benefit of American students. By any measure, the Center is building a lasting legacy as a prominent voice and independent authority on public education and public schools:

- **A Prominent Voice for Public Schools.** Journalists have made the Center one of the most widely sourced and reported organizations in American education. The Center’s work has been cited in thousands of news stories at the national, state, and local levels. No organization has generated a greater amount of public attention for independent analysis on the No Child Left Behind Act. The Center’s work is regularly reported by some of the nation’s most prominent media outlets including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, the Associated Press, NPR, and ABC News.

- **Outsized Influence.** In December 2006, *Education Week* identified the Center as one of the 10 most influential education organizations in the country, based on a survey of education leaders. The U.S. Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation were also listed in the top 10. The Center employs a smaller staff and maintains a smaller budget—by far—than any of the other top 10 organizations.

- **Presidential Recognition.** The Center’s publication, *Do You Know the Good News About American Schools?*, earned the attention of President Bill Clinton and his Cabinet, including U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley. President George W. Bush praised the Center for its nonpartisan work, specifically citing the report *Has Student Achievement Increased Since NCLB?*.

- **Information and Support for Public Policy.** In recent years, Center President & CEO Jack Jennings has been invited to testify repeatedly before Congressional committees to discuss various aspects of the Center’s research. Governors’ offices and state legislators have frequently contacted the Center for information and advice.

- **Official and Academic Citations.** The Center’s widely respected and trusted research and analysis has won the rare endorsement of repeated inclusion in some of the nation’s most important official and academic writings. Then-U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings referred to the Center’s reports in her speeches, and the U.S. Department of Education has cited the Center’s work in its budget documents that contain policy suggestions to Congress, as well as its flagship *Condition of Education* report. The Center’s reports have also been cited in scores of academic articles and papers, and the American Educational Research Association recently awarded Jack Jennings with its Distinguished Public Service Award, one of its highest honors.

- **A Resource for Postsecondary Learning.** Professors at many of the nation’s universities, including Columbia, Harvard, and Stanford, have integrated the Center’s reports and analysis into their teaching materials for undergraduate and graduate courses.
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