NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Chloe Louvouezo at 202-955-9450 ext. 314 or clouvouezo@communicationworks.com

Despite Gains in State Test Scores, Performance Remains Low for African American Students as a Group, CEP Study Finds

Stronger and More Focused Policy Actions Needed to Raise Achievement

WASHINGTON—June 30, 2010—A new study from the Center on Education Policy (CEP) finds that African American students have made gains on state reading and math tests and have narrowed achievement gaps with white students since 2002, when the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act took effect. Despite this progress, African American students as a group often had the lowest performance among racial/ethnic groups on 2008 state tests at grades 4, 8, and the high school grade assessed for NCLB. This pattern was evident in states with the greatest numbers of African American students, as well as many other states.

The study, *A Call to Action to Raise Achievement for African American Students*, summarizes key results for African American students on the state tests used for accountability under NCLB. CEP analyzed 2008 state test results, as well as trends since 2002 in the black-white achievement gap and in the percentages of African American students reaching various achievement levels. Their findings were drawn from test data gathered by CEP from all 50 states.

According to the report, the percentages of African American students scoring at the proficient level on state reading and math tests have increased since 2002. For example, 31 of the 36 states with sufficient data showed gains for African Americans in grade 4 reading, and 32 of 36 states posted gains for this subgroup in grade 4 math. The proportions of states with gains for African Americans were roughly similar to, and in some cases higher than, the comparable proportions for other subgroups.

African Americans also have narrowed achievement gaps with white students in both reading and math at grades 4, 8, and the tested high school grade in most states. Even so, achievement gaps remain large, and African American students as a group are not achieving at the levels needed for success beyond high school.

Across all states with adequate data, African American students had the lowest median percentage proficient in 2008, with few exceptions, among major racial/ethnic subgroups in reading and math at the three grades analyzed. (Other major subgroups include Asian American, Latino, Native American, and white students.) In addition, African American students were often the lowest-performing subgroup in the nine states with the highest number of

African-American test-takers. These states, which together enroll more than half of the African American test-takers in the country, include Georgia, Texas, Florida, New York, California, Illinois, North Carolina, Louisiana, and Michigan,

"The test score gains and the narrowing of the achievement gap by African-American students are encouraging," said Jack Jennings, CEP's president and CEO. "But, we still have a serious problem on our hands because African-American students are too often the lowest scoring group of students."

CEP also found that the states in which African Americans were the lowest-performing subgroup at *all* tested grades tended to have a relatively large share of students attending African-American-isolated public schools, or those with African American enrollments of 90 percent or more. In these states, the percentages of African American students attending African American-isolated schools averaged 20 percent and sometimes exceeded 40 percent.

"These findings suggest that the greatest problem is in racially isolated schools," said Jennings. "We must concentrate on improving those schools, and we should also return to the goal of reducing racial segregation in the schools."

Consistent with the data reported by states for NCLB accountability, the patterns highlighted by CEP deal with the performance of African American students in the aggregate. The diverse African American subgroup also includes many high-achieving students, as well as students representing the full range of achievement, income level, and backgrounds.

The report considers policies that could be undertaken to raise achievement for African American students. Possible policy actions include improving course offerings and instruction in schools with high concentrations of African American students and distributing effective teachers more equitably to these schools. Since a majority of African American students come from economically disadvantaged families, policy steps must also focus on helping families address the challenges of poverty. Other actions might include improving the cultural awareness of teachers of African American students, reducing racial and economic segregation in the educational system, and addressing a variety of out-of-school factors that affect learning.

In review, below are key highlights to consider from the report:

- Since 2002, African American students have made gains in the percentage of students reaching proficiency benchmarks on state tests and have narrowed achievement gaps with white students in most states. But progress has been uneven, and many African American students are not achieving at the levels needed for future success.

- As a group, African American students were often the lowest-performing racial/ethnic subgroup in 2008 on state reading and math tests at grades 4, 8, and the high school tested. This was the case in the majority of the states with sufficient data, as well as in the nine states with the highest numbers of African American test-takers.

- States in which African Americans were the lowest-performing subgroup at *all* tested grades tended to have a relatively large share of students attending schools with African American enrollments of 90% or more.

- State test results for African American students point to a vital need for local, state, and federal policymakers, educators, and others to address in-school and out-of-school

factors affecting achievement for this group. Possible policy actions include improving course offerings and instruction in schools with high concentrations of African American students, distributing effective teachers more equitably to these schools, and reducing *de facto* racial and economic segregation in the educational system. Since a majority of African American students come from economically disadvantaged families, policy steps must also focus on helping families address the challenges of poverty.

To coincide with the release of this report, **CEP is also releasing two other reports that look at the performance of Latino and Asian American students on state reading and math tests**. To request copies of these reports, please contact Chloe Louvouezo. Other related research is available on CEP's Web site, www.cep-dc.org.

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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.