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RESEARCH

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January 16, 2003

Press Release

Contact:

Gail Sunderman
Principal Investigator
glsunderman@yahoo.com
410-435-1207

Christopher Tracey
Principal Investigator
chris.tracey@post.harvard.edu
617-495-3617 (office)
617-731-7995 (home)

Gary Orfield
Director
The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University
gary_orfield@harvard.edu
617-496-4824 (office)
617-576-2840 (home)
617-359-2892 (cell)

THE CIVIL RIGHTS PROJECT AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY RELEASES RESULTS OF TEACHER SURVEY: VIEWS FROM TWO COASTS ON WHETHER NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND IS WORKING

Cambridge, MA – September 7, 2004 – Today, as schools around the country re-open and the debate about federal education policy intensifies, The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (CRP) releases the findings of a survey that collected urban teachers' opinions regarding the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The survey, designed by CRP, a non-partisan interdisciplinary research center at Harvard University, asked teachers to evaluate both the theories at the heart of the NCLB and the impact of the law in the classroom.

Thanks to the cooperation of the Fresno Unified School District (Fresno, CA) and the Richmond Public Schools (Richmond, VA), CRP was able to collect, with a high response rate, the views of close to 1,500 teachers. The report released today, *Listening to Teachers: Classroom Realities and No Child Left Behind*, analyzes these responses. It is part of CRP's five-year study of the implementation of NCLB in 11 urban districts and 6 states that has previously released four major reports.

The report outlines the teachers' complex and nuanced views of NCLB, agreeing with many of the law's goals but expressing concern that aspects of its implementation may be negatively impacting curriculum, instruction, and the ability of underperforming schools to attract and retain teachers. They also evaluate their schools, share their opinions regarding specific aspects of the law, including sanctions such as public school choice and supplemental services, and they inform policy decisions by

suggesting the types of resources they believe are integral to improving student achievement.

CRP Director, and co-author of the report, Professor Gary Orfield commented: "Since the law is all about how to change what happens in the classroom, it is about time we seriously examined what teachers have actually experienced and how they are responding to the reforms. What the teachers say fits with what we have been finding in our ongoing study of six states and eleven districts and we think that the teachers' thoughtful ideas deserve to be taken seriously."

Co-author Gail Sunderman, explained: "Teachers are struggling to implement NCLB, and they offer some very good ideas about what they need for school reform to be effective."

Co-author Christopher Tracey, commented: "The teachers in these urban school districts, though facing increased pressure and difficult working conditions, were optimistic about their schools and willing to accept fair levels of accountability for student achievement if given appropriate resources and support. We should listen to what they say matters as we continue to look for ways to improve the academic achievement of low-income youth."

The full text of the report, **EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL 12:01 AM TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7**, can be found at http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/articles/NCLB_Survey_Report.pdf. A copy of the report's Executive Summary can be found at the end of this advisory. Copies of CRP's previously released NCLB reports may also be found on our web site.

The Civil Rights Project's work in elementary and secondary education is funded by grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and the National Education Association.

About the Authors:

Professor Gary Orfield is Professor of Education and Social Policy and founding Director of The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University and is the author of many books and articles on school desegregation and other civil rights issues and his work was cited by the U.S. Supreme Court in its recent decision on affirmative action. His complete biography is available online at: <http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/aboutus/bios/orfield.php>

Gail Sunderman, Ph.D. is a Research Associate in K-12 Education at The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. She received her doctorate in Political Science from the University of Chicago. Her research focuses on educational policy and politics, and urban school reform, including the development and implementation of education policy and the impact of policy on the educational opportunities for at-risk students. At The Civil Rights Project, she is involved in a five-year study examining the implementation of the "No Child Left Behind Act" of 2001 and how this legislation influences educational change in states and local school districts.

Christopher Tracey, Ed.M. is a Research Associate in K-12 Education at The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. He received his Master's degree in Administration, Planning, and Social Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. His research focuses on the impact of test-based accountability systems on

urban youth, federal education policy, and urban school reform. At The Civil Rights Project, he is involved in a five-year study examining the implementation of the “No Child Left Behind Act” of 2001 and the effects of its standards-based accountability system on the achievement of low-income and minority students.

Jimmy Kim, Ed. D. is an Associate Professor of Education at University of California at Irvine. He received his doctorate in Administration, Planning, and Social Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Prior to his professorial appointment, he was a Research Associate for K-12 Education at The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. His research has focused on the effects of compensatory education programs on the racial achievement gap.

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Listening to Teachers: Classroom Realities and No Child Left Behind

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

No Child Left Behind: The Teachers’ Voice survey grew out of our national study on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which is examining many aspects of NCLB implementation in six states and eleven school districts. Since there is much in NCLB that is aimed at teachers, we wanted to know what teachers think about the law and how they, and their schools, are responding to its strategies for change.

Thanks to the cooperation of two urban school districts in Fresno, California and Richmond, Virginia, we obtained survey responses from two groups of teachers on opposite ends of the country. These two school districts serve many low-income and minority students, with one serving mostly Latino students and the other mostly African-American students, and each operates within a very different state policy and reform context. The response rate of the teachers to our survey was 77.4%. The survey was administered in May-June 2004.

Key Findings

1. Teachers have a thoughtful and nuanced view of reform that is quite consistent across districts and across teachers in both schools that are doing well and those that have been identified as in need of improvement under NCLB.
2. Teachers believed their schools have high standards and that the curriculum in their school was of high quality and linked to academic standards. They believed teachers in their schools were working hard to provide quality instruction, were dedicated to improving student achievement, and were accepting of accountability if it was based on a system that fairly measured instructional performance. They think their schools can improve more.
3. They did not believe that identifying schools that had not made adequate yearly progress would lead to school improvement. They viewed the transfer option quite negatively but were somewhat more positive about the potential of supplemental educational services to improve schools. Teachers strongly believed that the NCLB sanctions would unfairly reward and punish teachers.
4. Many of the teachers in schools that were identified as needing improvement do not plan to be teaching in them five years in the future. Teachers also believed that the NCLB sanctions would cause teachers to transfer out of schools not making adequate progress. These results suggest that there is a very serious problem in getting teachers to make a long-term commitment to teach in poorly

performing schools and that designating schools as “in need of improvement” under NCLB may make things worse.

5. Teachers confirm that the NCLB accountability system is influencing the instructional and curricular practices of teachers, but it is producing unintended and possibly negative consequences. They reported that, in response to NCLB accountability, they ignored important aspects of the curriculum, de-emphasized or neglected untested topics, and focused instruction on the tested subjects, probably excessively. Teachers rejected the idea that the NCLB testing requirements would focus teacher’s instruction or improve the curriculum.
6. Teachers reported that reform was underway prior to NCLB, and in some cases NCLB disrupted these reform efforts. There is evidence from the survey to support the idea of “policy churn,” that is, schools in high-poverty districts, and particularly low-performing schools, are continually changing their educational programs in response to calls for reform.
7. Teachers provide some insightful thoughts about what they need to meet high standards and improve student performance:

They need more resources, and they had highly nuanced views of what resources matter. In particular, teachers desired more money for curricular and instructional materials aligned with state standards.

Additional time to collaborate with other teachers was more important to them than more professional development.

They expressed support for the importance of small classes.

They want experienced administrators in their schools, they want to work with experienced teachers, and they want more involvement of parents.

They were not opposed to removing ineffective teachers.

They believed public recognition and rewards for improving student performance were more effective than sanctions for poor performance.

Recommendations

The teacher responses to the survey questions, and the highly consistent information we have received in our work on our long-term, six state study suggest the following priority issues for consideration as NCLB continues to evolve.

1. Schools need additional resources, but not just more money. Current resources could be reallocated, particularly the 20% set-aside for supplemental educational services and transfers, and better focused on curricular and instructional materials tied to state standards and on developing coherent instructional programs.
2. There is an urgent need for strong, committed, long-term leaders in poorly performing schools. There is nothing in NCLB to attract administrators to such schools, which should become a key goal in reforming schools and districts.
3. To mitigate the high turnover and low retention of teachers in high-poverty schools serving large numbers of minority students, NCLB should provide funding for improving the working conditions in these schools and additional support for helping teachers with out-of-school problems. NCLB should facilitate teachers’ desire for more time for school staffs to work together to improve learning by funding the time for these efforts.
4. Accountability should be continued but refocused in critical ways. Standardized testing should be only one part of assessing school performance and should measure not only existing achievement levels but also the contribution a school makes to improving student achievement. Accountability should continue rather than disrupt good reform programs already underway and should reinforce rather than take time away from the basic activities of teaching and learning.

While opinion surveys have limits as a source of policy guidance, teachers' views are very important to the success of any educational reform, including NCLB. These survey responses deserve serious consideration given their thoughtfulness, the complexity of opinions expressed, the close divisions on some issues, and the fact that the teachers whose schools are succeeding under the law report most of the same issues that the teachers in the less successful schools indicate. These opinions cannot be interpreted as defensive justifications of failure. The fact that teachers from two very different cities in two very different states that are three thousand miles apart often agree is noteworthy. We hope this report will help teachers to be heard as the debate over the law's future continues.

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