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Number of California Schools Facing “Restructuring” – No Child Left Behind’s Controversial Last Consequence – Increases Sharply

California Struggles to Find Effective Remedies

WASHINGTON – February 28, 2007 – California educators face an uphill battle to improve schools in restructuring – the No Child Left Behind Act’s ultimate sanction for struggling schools – according to a new study from the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Education Policy. The number of California schools facing the sanction nearly doubled in the last year, increasing from 401 schools in 2005-06 to 701 in 2006-07, or roughly 8 percent of California schools.

The study, *Beyond the Mountains: An Early Look at Restructuring Results in California*, examined the restructuring process in California. Schools are placed in restructuring when they have missed adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets for five or more consecutive years; these schools must undertake reform strategies intended to boost their performance. More than 60 percent of California’s restructuring schools are in urban areas and one-third are in suburban areas – a higher share of suburban schools than in the previous year.

California has more schools facing this mandated reform than most other states not only because it is a large state, but also because it began implementing test-based accountability systems sooner than most states. California started calculating AYP under the federal law that preceded No Child Left Behind.

Of those schools in restructuring’s implementation phase, 207 have failed to make AYP for seven consecutive years, and 10 have failed to make AYP for eight consecutive years. Meanwhile, only 10 schools that were in any phase of restructuring made achievement gains that were sufficient to allow them to exit school improvement in the last year.

Contrary to the assumption behind the U.S. Department of Education’s recent call for disallowing “minor” restructuring strategies in favor of replacing staff or reconstituting the school’s governance structure, CEP’s study finds that California schools that replaced staff were no more likely to increase the percentages of proficient students on state tests than restructuring schools in general. Instead, officials at schools that improved student achievement attributed their success to analyzing school data and tailoring interventions to the needs of the particular school.

The report also finds that few California schools in restructuring converted into charter schools (2 percent) or turned their operation over to an outside entity (10 percent). Instead, 30 percent replaced staff and 89 percent of schools implemented the “undertake any other major restructuring of the school’s governance that produces fundamental reform” option. In California this approach has taken a variety of forms, including designating a district-level coordinator, changing school schedules, hiring coaches to improve instruction, and adding instructional programs to improve achievement for English language learners. The percentages of schools

choosing various options do not total 100 percent since some schools used more than one restructuring strategy.

And while many schools elect to engage in a variety of restructuring reform options, the report notes that schools using the “any other” option—and not also replacing staff, turning the school over to an outside entity, or becoming a charter—in 2005-06 were more likely to meet AYP targets in English language arts (ELA) than restructuring schools in general. Of the 164 schools that fit these criteria, 50 percent (or 82 schools) met AYP targets in ELA based on 2005-06 testing, compared with 44 percent of all schools in restructuring implementation. This finding should be viewed with caution, however, because it is based on just one year of data and the types of actions taken under the any-other option varied greatly.

“California is beginning to offer federal and state officials an important look at the impact of restructuring on struggling schools,” said Jack Jennings, president and CEO of the Center on Education Policy. “While it is still too early to tell whether restructuring is working, it is clear from the experience of California and Michigan, the two states we have studied in-depth, that simply requiring schools to replace staff does not guarantee increased student achievement. Rather, success is linked to implementing multiple improvement strategies.”

To understand better California’s efforts, the Center conducted case studies through interviews and document reviews in four school districts and eight schools in restructuring. The case studies show that all the participating schools have implemented teacher team planning time, added teacher or principal coaches and changed their schedules to allow more time for special instruction for struggling students. In addition, all interviewees mentioned they would like to see the law give credit for individual students’ growth, regardless of whether they make AYP. The case study districts and schools include:

- Grant Joint Union School District, which includes Martin Luther King, Jr. Junior High School and Grant Union High School;
- Oakland Unified School District, which includes Cox Elementary, Highland Elementary, Sobrante Park Elementary and Whittier Elementary;
- Palmdale Elementary School District, which includes Yucca Elementary; and
- Tahoe-Truckee Joint Unified School District, which includes North Tahoe Middle School.

Over the past three years, the Center on Education Policy has conducted a series of analyses of the school restructuring processes in Maryland, Michigan and California as part of its comprehensive, multiyear study of the No Child Left Behind Act. The reports are all available at www.cep-dc.org.

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.

The report, along with additional information on CEP, its publications and its work, is available on the web at www.cep-dc.org.