



Public involvement. Public education. Public benefit.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 1, 2006

CONTACT:

Arnold Fege (202) 628-7460

afege@publiceducation.org

Julie McDonough (202) 572-2867

julie.mcdonough@gmmb.com

**STUDENTS, PARENTS & COMMUNITY LEADERS SPEAK OUT
ON NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT**

***Public Hearings Across the Country Reveal Confusion, Concern, and Anger Over
Implementation of NCLB***

WASHINGTON, DC—Public concern over implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) is rising, according to a new report issued today by Public Education Network. *Open to the Public: The Public Speaks out on No Child Left Behind*, identifies specific concerns voiced by more than 1500 parents, students, taxpayers, and community leaders at open public hearings from September to January of this year. The hearings were designed to gain grassroots and civic input on the law from groups often left out of the policy debate, yet profoundly impacted by its implementation.

Throughout the hearings, the public rejected a single test as an accurate measure of school improvement. Parents and community leaders indicated that discrepancies between state and federal measures of school progress have created a deep mistrust of high-stakes tests and other NCLB indicators as accurate assessments of school performance. And, they believe that accountability must be expanded to include additional measures of school and student progress, developed with the input of local educators, parents, and the community.

Americans are also angered by the labeling of schools as “in need of improvement” because they say that this label erodes public support for these schools. Rather than increasing the public’s sense of responsibility for demanding additional support and resources, ‘in need of improvement’ labels are perceived as punitive and can result in student, teacher, and community abandonment of the very schools most in need of support.

“Americans support the goals of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* and believe accountability is necessary to improve our public schools,” said Public Education Network (PEN) President Wendy D. Puriefoy. “This law was written with a specific emphasis on public and parental involvement at the center of the legislation. We heard repeated testimony that the public felt uninformed and, in some cases, actively excluded from having a voice in the school improvement process.”

--more--

Feedback from students revealed that they experience enormous pressure passed along from teachers and administrators worried about school performance. NCLB testing places excessive stress on students, particularly English language learners and special education students, causing some to drop out. Students were concerned they did not have the support and resources they needed to meet the requirements of the law.

At the hearings, parents made it clear that they do not receive timely information about the law and that the purpose of NCLB assessments is not explained to parents and students. In general, parents felt uninformed of their roles and responsibilities under NCLB and did not feel involved in decision-making.

However, while parents and students voiced their frustration and concern, they did say they were willing to do their part to improve public schools in their communities. They believe that schools cannot achieve the goals of NCLB alone and that community support and accountability are crucial for school and student success. Parents believe that part of accountability means providing kids with the academic, social, and community supports they need to succeed and called for shared responsibility within the community.

The public also recommended the following changes to the law and its implementation including:

- Accountability that truly supports measurable student achievement and gives credit for significant progress made.
- Improved academic resources for students, including increased quality and availability of supplemental educational services.
- An expanded definition of “highly qualified teachers” to include training on parent and community involvement as well as on cultural competency.
- Enforced parent involvement provisions so parents can participate in meaningful ways and administration officials can more effectively engage parents.

“School success is a shared responsibility and the public recognizes that their involvement is critical to improving the schools in their communities,” said Puriefoy. “Now, we must engage them in meaningful ways to help us determine how we can provide our students with the support they need to succeed.”

Public hearings were held in Austin, Boston, Chicago, Columbus, Detroit, New York City, Orlando, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco. The hearings represent the second of three sets of national forums to be held by PEN and regional partners to help inform the law’s reauthorization in 2007. The complete national report, as well as the individual state reports, is available online at www.PublicEducation.org.

###

Public Education Network (www.PublicEducation.org) is a national organization of local education funds (LEFs) and individuals working to improve public schools and build public support for quality public education for poor and disadvantaged children in low-income communities across the nation. PEN and its 88 LEF members work in 34 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico on behalf of 11.5 million children in more than 16,000 schools, seeking to bring the community voice into the debate on quality public education in the firm belief that an active, vocal constituency will ensure every child, in every community, a quality public education. In addition, PEN’s international affiliates serve more than 7 million children in Mexico, Peru, and the Philippines.