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California Sees Little Success With Struggling Schools Facing “Restructuring” Under No Child Left Behind

Over 1,000 Schools Now Face Sanctions; Few Have Made AYP

WASHINGTON—February 8, 2007—Because of its long history of school accountability dating back to the mid 1990s, California is one of the first states to see a significant number of persistently low performing schools face restructuring—the No Child Left Behind Act’s ultimate sanction for struggling schools. As a result, education officials and policymakers nationwide are monitoring the state’s experience in working to lift achievement in the struggling schools.

That experience, however, has been largely frustrating, according to a new report from the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Education Policy (CEP), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that has tracked the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act since it became law in 2002.

The number of California schools in restructuring, which have missed adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets for five or more consecutive years, has increased by over 150 percent since 2005-06—about 300 schools per year over the last two years. The total number now stands at 1,013, representing about 11 percent of all California public schools and by far the largest number in any state nationwide. While urban schools are still the majority of the 1,013 schools in restructuring (60 percent), the proportion of suburban schools among all of California’s schools in restructuring has risen to about 35 percent.

By entering restructuring, the schools are subjected to a number of major, school-wide reform strategies intended to dramatically boost their performance. However, the report indicates that few schools have raised achievement enough to exit the improvement status.

Based on 2006-07 testing, only 33 schools, or 5 percent of schools in restructuring that year, raised test scores enough to exit improvement. In 2005-06, just 10 schools, or 3 percent of those in restructuring, exited improvement. Overall, several hundred schools have been in restructuring for six years or more, having failed to meet performance targets after years of restructuring.

“California’s experience shows how difficult it is to turn around schools facing so many challenges,” said Jack Jennings, president and CEO of the Center on Education Policy. “We should all have a sense of humility about the complexity of this task, and not go rushing off looking for simplistic solutions.”

The study, *Managing More Than A Thousand Remodeling Projects: School Restructuring in California*, finds that among the five restructuring options in federal law, a large majority of California schools implementing restructuring in 2006-07—90 percent—used the “any-other option,” which

allows schools and districts to take any major action aside from the other four options to produce fundamental change in the school's governance structure. Actions taken under this option varied widely, from adding district employees to guide each restructuring school to dividing schools into several smaller schools. In contrast, far fewer schools elected to turn school management over to an outside organization (10 percent) or reopen as a charter school (1 percent).

Meanwhile, the report finds that no single federal restructuring option, based on statistical analysis, has proved to be more effective than the others in helping schools meet overall AYP targets overall or AYP targets in English language arts or math separately.

As part of its report, CEP conducted in-depth case studies of four California school districts with schools in restructuring—Grant Joint Union, Oakland Unified, Palmdale Elementary, and Tahoe-Truckee Joint Unified—and of nine restructuring schools within those districts. In its case studies, CEP found that in their efforts to boost achievement:

- **Schools have employed multiple strategies beyond federal restructuring options**, including using data to inform instructional decisions; increasing teacher collaboration and team planning time; adding teacher or principal coaches; and changing schedules to allow more time for special instruction for struggling students.
- **Non-academic factors appear to compromise efforts to raise achievement.** Interviews with district and school officials revealed that many believe that efforts to improve student achievement are compromised in part by the challenges of working with students who arrive at school unprepared to learn, lack support for homework, are influenced by gangs, or face other problems often found in low-income communities.

According to the report, federal and state officials can take several steps to assist California districts and schools in the restructuring process, including:

- Provide more guidance on how to raise achievement and additional monitoring of the effectiveness of ongoing restructuring efforts;
- Examine non-academic supports, given the impact of factors in students' lives outside of school on their achievement; and
- Expand funding for school improvement to overcome the situation in California and other states that have improvement efforts undermined by declines in available resources and sharp increases in the numbers of schools that need funding.

The Center on Education Policy has conducted a series of analyses of the school restructuring efforts in California, Maryland and Michigan as part of its comprehensive, multiyear study of the No Child Left Behind Act. In 2008, NCLB school restructuring efforts in Ohio and Georgia and will also be studied. The restructuring reports and other CEP NCLB publications are available at 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.

The report, along with additional information from CEP, is available online at www.cep-dc.org.