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APPLESEED STUDY FINDS MORE ATTENTION NEEDED TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT FOR FEDERAL NCLB LAW TO BE A SUCCESS

Parental Involvement Necessary for Students and Schools

Washington, D.C. – Federal, state and local officials need to do a better job of abiding by the parental involvement sections of the No Child Left Behind Act, according to a national report issued today by Appleseed.

The publication titled “It Takes A Parent: Transforming Education in the Wake of the No Child Left Behind Act” is based on research involving 18 school districts in six states, including Georgia. Other findings: data reports are often confusing and overwhelming, and parents wait months for performance results, often into the next school year; teachers and administrators often lack training in how to engage parents; and parent involvement has fallen to the bottom of the list of NCLB requirements, though it is integral to the success of the law and of students and schools. Current parent involvement provisions of the Act are solid and ambitious, but require more faithful implementation and greater enforcement.

“Appleseed has placed its finger on the pulse of a core education issue that is often overlooked,” said U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson. “Informed parents are able to make a crucial difference in the academic success of children and the overall performance of schools.”

The stakes are not just legal compliance, but an opportunity to incorporate parents as a key resource to propel student learning and narrow the academic achievement gaps.

“Without better informed and involved parents, all of the testing and data is just a lot of paper – the proverbial fallen tree in the forest that no one hears,” said Linda Singer, Appleseed Executive Director. “Spectacular things can happen when parents become knowledgeable advocates for their child’s learning and first-line supporters of public schools.”

Views expressed by scores of parents were echoed by federal and state officials, community groups and local educators: Parents are a crucial – and often overlooked – resource in the quest to raise student academic performance.

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Under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, schools must notify parents about the test results of individual students and the schools they attend. In addition, the law obligates local school systems to adopt parent involvement policies and to actively enlist the help of parents when constructing school-wide improvement plans.

“A problem,” said Sharon Hill, Georgia Appleseed Executive Director, “is that school leaders often do not look to their parent involvement strategy as a ‘core strategy’ in the overall school improvement plan. Our research shows, however, that high performing schools do just that . . . pull parents into meaningful engagement in a multi-faceted effort to raise academic achievement for all students. The hopeful news is this: published research shows that parent involvement does make a real difference, and that this is true no matter how poor a family is or what level of education the parent has or how old the student is . . . if the parent cares and is involved, the student will do better in school.”

Among the findings and recommendations for local and state officials and parents are:

- 1) States, districts and schools must provide meaningful, understandable and timely information to parents regarding key school and student performance;
- 2) Districts and schools should pursue multiple, proactive strategies for communicating and engaging parents – particularly parents who are low-income or whose first language is not English.
- 3) Districts and schools should leverage their limited resources by engaging community organizations;
- 4) Federal state and districts officials need to prioritize and fund better professional development for teachers and administrators – with special emphasis on challenges of culture and language. States should likewise consider including a practical focus on effective collaboration with parents as a requirement for teaching and administrative licenses; and
- 5) Federal, state and local policymakers and educators should recognize parental involvement as central to school improvement and place parental involvement strategies on par with other steps taken to improve student achievement.

The NCLB report was published by Appleseed, in coordination with several other key law firms and groups. In Georgia, the national law firm of Holland & Knight coordinated and carried out much of the research and drafted the final report. DLA Piper, another prominent national law firm, helped in two of the six states. The National Center for Children and Families at Teachers College, Columbia University and PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP also played key roles in Georgia gathering and assessing information, as well. Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice focused on interviewing parents around the state and in the preparation of the report and will be tasked with working with its partners around the state to promote the recommendations in Georgia.

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Appleseed is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building a just society. Appleseed is a national group, but works at the local level, establishing and networking independent public interest law centers that identify and address issues community-by-community. As one of the nation's largest legal pro bono networks, our Appleseed Centers develop practical and lasting solutions to chronic injustices in public education, health care, child welfare, justice, and immigration.

Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, public interest law center founded in Georgia in 2005 as one of 18 Appleseed Centers located throughout the United States and in Mexico. For more information, please contact Sharon N. Hill at shill@appleseeds.net or 404-815-5903.