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Language Policy Research Unit

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

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**NCLB FAILS TO MEET NEEDS OF LANGUAGE MINORITY STUDENTS,
STUDY SAYS**

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TEMPE, Ariz. (Tuesday, February 8, 2005) — By way of devaluing bilingual education through high-stakes testing and English-only programs, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 fails to address the needs of language minority students, according to a policy brief released by the Language Policy Research Unit of Arizona State University's Education Policy Studies Laboratory.

The brief, "Evolution of Federal Policy and Implications of No Child Left Behind For Language Minority Students," illustrates how the federal government had progressively taken steps toward meeting the needs of English language learners and, in doing so, gave worth to bilingual skills.

In 2001, however, the passing of NCLB into law marked a dramatic shift in that path. The word, "bilingual," was absent from the act and English language learners were re-categorized as "limited English proficient," or LEP.

Dr. Wayne E. Wright, assistant professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio and author of the brief, finds that the government's change in education policy and its use of high-stakes testing brings on the following issues:

- Schools are expected to make adequate yearly progress in their test scores with regard to all subgroups, including students labeled LEP. When testing LEP students, NCLB allows for exceptions and accommodations, but the number of students whose scores can be excluded is minimal, and acceptable accommodations are neither defined nor spelled out.
- The goals for LEP programs are simply to mainstream the students as soon as possible and to teach them the content of the state standardized exams. The pressure of raising scores discourages instruction focusing on the true needs of LEP students.

- The majority of LEP students are being forced to take standardized tests in a language in which they are not yet proficient.
- Funding for LEP students nearly doubled, however, these federal funds are now spread more thinly, resulting in less dollars per eligible LEP student.
- NCLB no longer makes a distinction between bilingual programs or special alternative instructional programs. The federal law now only requires that LEP students be placed in “language instruction education programs.” The use of teaching the student’s native language is “optional.”
- While LEP students must be tested, states are finding creative ways to exclude their scores, thus helping many schools avoid being held accountable for a LEP subgroup. This may create an illusion of success while the real needs of LEP students are being ignored.
- Bilingual education programs are still allowed under NCLB, but only if state education leaders deem them as “scientifically based” and are willing to fund them. Anti-bilingual education measures in some states make it extremely difficult for schools in those states to offer quality bilingual education programs.

Wright concludes: “Many schools are adopting scripted one-size-fits-all curricular programs (often with federal support) which take up large amounts of instructional time ... The irony here is that while teachers are giving up what they recognize as good instruction for LEP students in the name of preparing them for high-stakes tests, many of these students’ test scores will end up being excluded anyway from school AYP designations, using the minimum group size rule and negotiated exclusions with the U.S. Department of Education. ...

“This is a recipe for leaving LEP students behind.”

Find this document on the web at:

<http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsl/EPRU/documents/EPSSL-0501-101-LPRU.pdf>

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The Language Policy Research Unit (LPRU), co-directed by Dr. Terrence Wiley and Dr. Wayne Wright, promotes research and policy analysis on the challenges and opportunities posed by global multiculturalism. LPRU activities are intended to inform public discussion and policymaking in state, national, and international contexts.

Visit the LPRU website at <http://language-policy.org/>

The Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL) at Arizona State University offers high quality analyses of national education policy issues and provides an analytical resource for educators, journalists, and citizens. It includes the Arizona Education Policy Initiative (AEPI), the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU), the Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU), and the Language Policy Research Unit (LPRU). The EPSL is directed by Professor Alex Molnar.

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