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Education Policy Research Unit

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

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National Study Finds No Convincing Evidence that High-Stakes Testing Pressure Leads to Increased Student Achievement

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TEMPE, Ariz. (Tuesday, September 20, 2005) — The pressure associated with high-stakes testing has no real impact on student achievement, according to “High-Stakes Testing and Student Achievement: Problems for the No Child Left Behind Act,” a study released by the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University and the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice.

Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), high-stakes test scores are the indicators used to measure school and student success on a statewide basis. Low test scores can result in severe consequences for schools under this law. The underlying theory behind this type of accountability program is that the pressure of high-stakes testing will increase student achievement. But according to this study, there is no convincing evidence that this kind of pressure leads to increased student achievement.

The authors, Sharon L. Nichols, University of Texas at San Antonio, and Gene V Glass and David C. Berliner, Arizona State University, studied the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test data from 25 states. The results suggest that increases in testing pressure are related to increased retention in grade and drop-out rates. The authors found that states with the highest proportions of minority students implemented accountability systems that exerted the greatest pressure. Thus, the negative impacts of high-stakes testing will disproportionately affect America’s minority students.

“This most recent research demonstrates that the pressure to produce high test scores as a result of *No Child Left Behind* hasn’t helped students to achieve more, and has served to limit the depth and breadth of what students are being taught in schools around the country,” said Teri Moblo, director of the Great Lakes Center.

Four key findings emerged from the study:

- **States with greater proportions of minority students tend to implement accountability systems that exert greater pressure.** An unintended consequence of this patterning is that problems associated with high-stakes testing risk disproportionately affecting America's minority students.
- **Increased testing pressure is related to increased retention and drop-out rates.** High-stakes testing pressure is negatively associated with the likelihood that eighth and 10th graders will move into 12th grade.
- **NAEP reading scores at the fourth- and eighth-grade levels were not improved as a result of increased testing pressure.** This finding was consistent across African American, Hispanic, and White student subgroups.
- **Weak correlations between pressure and NAEP performance for fourth-grade mathematics and the unclear relationship for eighth-grade mathematics are unlikely linked to increased testing pressure.** While a weak relationship emerged at the fourth-grade level, a systematic link between pressure and achievement was not established. For eighth-grade performance, the lack of clarity in the relationship may arise from the interplay of other indirect factors. Inconsistent performance gains in these cases are far more likely the result of indirect factors such as teaching to the test, drill and practice, or the exclusion of lower-achieving students than pressure.

What the researchers could *not* find is also of great importance. Many different analyses were unable to establish any consistent link between the pressure to score high in a particular state and that state's student performance on the NAEP. That means that claims of a clear-cut link between pressure and performance cannot be considered credible.

“A rapidly growing body of research evidence on the harmful effects of high-stakes testing, along with no reliable evidence of improved performance by students on NAEP tests of achievement, suggests that we need a moratorium in public education on the use of high-stakes testing,” said Nichols, the study's lead author.

Find this document on the web at:

<http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsl/EPRU/documents/EPsl-0509-105-EPRU.pdf>

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