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**Big-City Schools Improve Implementation of *No Child Left Behind*,  
According to New Study**

***Cascading Sanctions Produce Uncertain Benefits for Higher Student Achievement***

WASHINGTON, Nov. 30 – The nation’s big-city school districts have improved implementation of the *No Child Left Behind* Act since it was enacted five years ago, resulting in higher numbers of students participating in choice and supplemental service programs. But the impact of the law’s sanctions on raising student achievement in urban schools remains unclear, according to a comprehensive new survey released today.

The analysis, “No Child Left Behind in America’s Great City Schools: Five Years and Counting,” is based on a preliminary review of data on big-city school compliance with key provisions of the law from 2002-03 to 2005-06. Thus far, 36 districts, enrolling 5.1 million students nationwide, have responded to a survey conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools, the Washington, D.C.-based coalition of big-city schools.

“The law is living up to many of the promises that its strongest proponents hoped for and most of the pitfalls that its harshest critics warned against,” said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council.

Collectively, the number of schools in the districts surveyed that needed improvement or were in “corrective action” or “restructuring” status under NCLB rose from 975 in the 2002-03 school year to 2,203 in the 2005-06 school year, despite substantial gains in student achievement on both state tests and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The total comprises 29.6 percent of all schools in the cities surveyed, or about 26.1 of all U.S. schools “in need of improvement.”

Conversely, the survey finds that across responding districts 143 schools exited the sanctions process by making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years after first being identified for improvement, while 388 schools made enough progress to have sanctions placed on “hold.”

In addition, results from the survey showed that most urban schools were in sanction status for not making NCLB targets in reading, although large numbers of schools had also not made math benchmarks. Most schools, moreover, were in sanction status for not making targets for multiple racial, income, language and disability subgroups.

Among the many findings, the report notes that states are returning spring testing data to their districts somewhat earlier, are making AYP determinations earlier, and that cities appear to be somewhat better positioned to use the data to improve programs.

But it also appears that in order to get results to districts before the next school year, some states have moved up test dates to earlier in the school year, resulting in less instructional time before assessments are given

and sanctions are levied; have submitted incomplete data for local use; and have reduced the amount of time that cities have to review the data for errors.

### ***School Choice & Supplemental Education Services***

In an investigation of two of the law's much-discussed provisions for students in struggling schools, the survey finds that more urban students are taking advantage of the option to transfer out of a poor-performing school while a larger number is making use of supplemental education services and tutoring.

Within the districts surveyed, about 2 percent of eligible students transferred schools under the NCLB choice provision. Though the overall number is small, it represents an increase of nearly 100 percent, with 22,553 students transferring in 2005-06 compared with 11,292 in 2002-03.

Notably, another 325,000 students were transferring to other schools using non-NCLB options such as charter and magnet schools, and open enrollment programs. In all, over 30 percent of students in urban communities were exercising some choice option, according to the analysis.

"The upward trend suggests that districts have gotten better at identifying available space and informing parents about their options," Casserly said.

Meanwhile, 34 of the 36 responding districts must offer supplemental services. About 16 percent of eligible students – averaging 111 students per eligible school – participated. The number of students enrolled in supplemental services increased from approximately 110,000 in 2003-04 to over 180,000 in 2005-06.

Approximately 95 percent of all participating students now receive their services from private providers. However, the limited number of available local evaluations suggests that tutorial sessions have had only modest effects on student achievement, at best.

### ***Corrective Action & Restructuring***

District approaches to boosting achievement in schools that have been placed in "corrective action" or "restructuring" phases after missing AYP targets for four and five straight years have largely focused on providing technical assistance, curriculum reform, professional development and planning support. Fewer districts have pursued the law's more punitive sanctions, including reopening the schools as charters, replacing all or most of the school staff, contracting with a private entity to run the schools, or turning the schools over to the state—probably due to the lack of clear evidence that such strategies boost achievement.

"Congress faces critical questions about the law's accountability system and whether it is effectively calibrated to improve instruction," Casserly said. "Although NCLB has proven complicated to implement and cumbersome to administer, it has also helped America's urban schools direct attention to students who, for too long, were out of sight and out of mind."

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