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ONLY 1.1 PERCENT OF HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS ARE TRULY ‘HIGH FLYERS,’ STUDY SAYS

Findings challenge Education Trust, Heritage Foundation studies

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TEMPE, Ariz. (Tuesday, March 21, 2006) — Only 1.1 percent of high-poverty schools consistently achieve at high levels on standardized tests, according to “Ending the Blame Game on Educational Inequity: A Study of ‘High Flying’ Schools and NCLB,” a policy brief released by the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University.

This finding directly challenges the results of policy studies published by the *Education Trust* and *Heritage Foundation* which claim that 15.6 percent of high-poverty schools are highly performing. According to study author and Florida State University Professor Doug Harris, the Education Trust and Heritage Foundations studies used questionable methodology to determine “high flying” schools. For instance, if one grade in a high-poverty school scored high on a standardized test in only one subject for one year, *Education Trust* deemed the school “high flying.” The study released today examines test score gains and performance over time to identify schools that achieve consistently at a high level.

Harris finds that the number of high-poverty schools reaching high performance status is much lower than previously reported, and the cause of this achievement gap is not mainly the fault of educators and administrators—as Education Trust and Heritage Foundation suggest—but is a function of the economic and social conditions facing the students enrolled in these schools.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) makes the same mistake, Harris argues. The law provides performance incentives for schools to help all students reach proficiency, but ignores the fact that, due to economic and social conditions, students

start school at very different levels of readiness. As a result, the law holds schools responsible for factors outside their control.

In addition, Harris finds that a low-poverty school is 22 times more likely to be high performing than a high-poverty school. Equally alarming, low-poverty, low-minority schools are 89 times more likely to be high performing than high-poverty, high-minority schools.

Based on his findings, Harris recommends the following:

- Policy makers continue the recent focus on measurable student outcomes, such as test scores, but redesign policies to hold educators accountable only for those factors within their control;
- Policy makers take a comprehensive approach to school improvement that starts in schools but extends into homes and communities, and addresses basic disadvantages caused by poverty; and
- All educational stakeholders acknowledge that educational inequity is caused by problems in both schools *and* communities—and avoid trying to blame the problem on schools alone.

Find this document on the web at:

<http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsl/EPRU/documents/EPSTL-0603-120-EPRU.pdf>

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The Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU) conducts original research, provides independent analyses of research and policy documents, and facilitates educational innovation. EPRU facilitates the work of leading academic experts in a variety of disciplines to help inform the public debate about education policy issues.

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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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