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New Report Shows How California's API Growth Model Hides Achievement Gaps

(Oakland, CA) – Recently, some California Education Leaders have created confusion about the fact that some schools that do well under state specific accountability guidelines (API) are labeled as failing under the new federal system of “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) put forth as part of the “No Child Left Behind Act” (NCLB) of 2002. These discrepancies have caused these education leaders to label NCLB's accountability provisions as “inaccurate, arbitrary, flawed, and even draconian.” This can't simply become a state vs. federal debate.

In fact, because AYP is designed to expose shortcomings in state accountability systems, such discrepancies are to be expected. This report shows that many schools that meet the statewide API are falling short – in some cases far short – of closing the gaps between high and low poverty students and between white students and students of color.

“We know schools are capable of getting better results and we need to hold those schools up that are achieving,” said Bill Hauck, chairman of California Business for Education Excellence. “Reporting this academic performance information is key and what we do with it is crucial. These kids don’t have a shelf life and they represent the workforce of tomorrow. They need help now.”

Education Trust-West and California Business For Education Excellence examined the schools that the California State Department of Education considers to have made “tremendous growth” according to the API but that did not meet federal AYP guidelines for the 2003-2004 school year.

Among the report’s key findings:

- Some schools described as making “tremendous” progress on API actually have a lower percentage of students proficient in 2004 than they did in 2002.

- The average gains of “tremendous growth” schools in percent of students reaching proficient on the California Standards Test are slight – 3.4% in language arts and 5.1% in mathematics.

- It would take more than a quarter of a century for poor and minority students in “tremendous growth” schools to reach proficiency.
“Is this ‘tremendous’ growth? Or are these schools in need of tremendous improvement?” asked Russlynn Ali, director of the Education Trust – West. “We always applaud improvement. But to single these schools out as achieving ‘tremendous growth’ – to divert attention from the achievement gaps exposed by AYP - is shameful, especially when so many low income, Latino and African American students in these schools are in need of urgent help,” she concluded.

How the API “Growth Model” Hides Achievement Gaps (Microsoft Word)