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**Public Hearing Gives Voice to Community Frustration,
Dissatisfaction with *No Child Left Behind***
*Standardized testing, lack of clear information about school performance
fuel parent and student concern*

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – Nearly 300 Bay Area parents, students and community leaders crowded into the San Francisco Main Public Library’s Koret Auditorium and at times lined up to give testimony at a public hearing Wednesday night to discuss the federal *No Child Left Behind* Act (NCLB). The hearing, hosted by the San Francisco Education Fund and the Washington DC-based Public Education Network (PEN), along with the Berkeley Public Education Foundation, Marcus A. Foster Educational Institute, and 13 other Bay Area community based-organizations, provided a unique opportunity for community members to share their views on the law and make recommendations on how it may be improved.

This month marks the anniversary of the law’s signing in 2002, and while participants agreed that the law has exposed serious achievement gaps at school and district levels, they believe new strategies are needed to ensure the law meets its goal of increased achievement for all students. Many, including Dan Grady, a teacher who has been certified as “exemplary” by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, expressed concern that an increased emphasis on standardized tests may be hurting, instead of helping students. “All I can do is give out ditto sheets,” Grady said.

“Teachers are scared and are forced to teach standards but not critical thinking skills,” said Roger Le, a student at San Francisco’s Balboa High School. “If we’re not really able to use what we’re learning, then what are we doing here (at school).”

High school students made a strong showing at yesterday’s hearing, and were especially critical of test-based accountability. They objected to the use of a single test to determine decisions about promotion and graduation, and criticized standardized tests for ignoring varying abilities and interests.

“It is wrong,” said Kevin Brown, a student from Oakland Unified School District, “to hold a student back because of not remembering something that was taught in middle school.”

Parents testified that provisions around parent involvement are not being carried out, and many parents, particularly those who require translation, said they are not receiving clear information about school performance.

“Parent and community involvement are critical to ensuring that the goals of No Child Left Behind are met,” said PEN President Wendy D. Puriefoy. “High expectations and accountability will only work when the community has the information and tools they need to make informed decisions and play a meaningful role in school reform.”

Hugh Vasquez, Executive Director of the San Francisco Education Fund, emphasized the intent of last night’s hearing was to correct mistakes made when NCLB was crafted by congressional lawmakers such as failing to engage the public and put adequate resources behind mandates.”

Throughout the evening, participants explored issues of testing and accountability; teacher quality; access to timely and understandable information about school and student performance; and the possible expansion of NCLB into high schools. While some accused the law of attempting to undermine public education, others shared their belief that NCLB is the “best opportunity” ever offered to educate all children well.

“It (NCLB) has forced an honest look at schools,” said Russlynn Ali, Director of the Education Trust-West in Oakland, “and in the face of all the pushback and misinformation it is important to hold the line on NCLB.”

Despite her recognition that the law has “some flaws”, Kim Shipp, a parent organizer from Oakland said, “The law allows for real accountability. Now parents have a law with strong teeth.”

Lisa Villarreal, one of the hearing officers for the event and a Program Officer with the San Francisco Foundation, concluded the hearing by reminding participants to be cautious and not completely dismantle a well-intentioned law because of “flawed implementation.”

The San Francisco hearing is the eighth in a series of ten public hearings being held by PEN with state and regional partners across the country. Hearings have already been held in New York City, Chicago, Columbus, Pittsburgh, Orlando, Boston, and Austin. The results of the 2005-2006 hearings, in addition to testimony provided online at www.sfedfund.org, will be published and distributed to key federal, state, and local decision makers and to education leaders and the media. This report will include suggested changes and improvements to this far-reaching law.

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San Francisco Education Fund (www.sfedfund.org). Founded in 1979, the San Francisco Education Fund is a community-based nonprofit organization working to improve the quality of teaching and learning in San Francisco public schools so that all students in this diverse community have the education necessary for full participation in the economic, civic, and cultural life of our society. In this critical time for education, the Ed Fund’s programs are bridging the gap between the community and the classroom to ensure that every student and teacher in the San Francisco public education system has the resources they need to thrive.

Public Education Network (www.PublicEducation.org) is a national organization of local education funds (LEFs) and individuals working to improve public schools and build public support for quality public education for poor and disadvantaged children in low-income communities across the nation. PEN and its 88 LEF members work in 34 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico on behalf of 11.5 million children in more than 16,000 schools, seeking to bring the community voice into the debate on quality public education in the firm belief that an active, vocal constituency will ensure every child, in every community, a quality public education.

The No Child Left Behind hearing was sponsored by the following Bay Area organizations: The American Indian Child Resource Center, California PTA, California Tomorrow, Chinese for Affirmative Action/Center for Asian American Advocacy, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, Community Leadership Academy Emergency Response (CLAER), East Bay Agency for Children, Greatschools.net, La Raza Centro Legal, NAACP -- San Francisco Chapter, Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), Parents for Public Schools San Francisco, and San Francisco Chamber of Commerce