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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

3,000 NYSUT DELEGATES CALL FOR NCLB FIX

WASHINGTON, D.C. April 25, 2007 – Nearly 3,000 delegates to New York State United Teachers' annual convention, meeting this week in Washington, D.C., will call on Congress to fix the No Child Left Behind Act, which teachers say has changed classroom instruction and narrowed the curriculum because of its over-emphasis on standardized tests.

Delegates are expected to offer their NCLB initiative based on feedback from surveys, in which New York teachers consistently voiced their frustration with the five-year-old federal law, including how it jeopardizes creativity and curriculum not specifically on the test.

“Standardized tests alone cannot give an accurate or complete picture of a child’s or a school’s performance,” said New York State United Teachers President Richard C. Iannuzzi. “Parents tell us anecdotally what teachers say in the surveys: the pendulum has swung too far in the wrong direction.”

“We are no longer educating ‘the whole child,’” said NYSUT Vice President Maria Neira, who oversees the union’s Division of Research and Educational Services. “We are educating the ‘fill-in-the-bubble child.’”

At the 575,000-member union's policy-making convention, which begins Thursday, delegates are expected to act on a resolution seeking changes in NCLB and its “average yearly progress” requirement. AYP sets artificial targets for school improvement and carries sanctions if a school, or any one of more than 50 sub-groups of students, fails to make sufficient progress. Falling short of an AYP target in one sub-group can falsely label an entire school as “failing.”

NYSUT will push for meaningful changes as Congress debates reauthorization of NCLB this year. In addition to urging the full funding that was promised when NCLB became law, New York teachers support changes that would make the NCLB “more sensible and fair,” Neira said. Teachers are asking Congress to:

- Allow states to develop appropriate tests for measuring the language arts skills of English language learners and special education students, and develop a way to fairly count their progress. Currently, ELL students must take the same ELA tests as their grade-level peers, even though they may be new immigrants and don’t yet have full command of the English language.
- Give credit for student progress and reward success. Permitting schools to use a growth model, which takes into account a child’s progress toward higher standards, provides better information on individual student learning.
- Distinguish struggling schools from those that are successful but need limited assistance.
- Acknowledge different rates of student learning; and
- Stop punishing entire schools and districts based on the test scores of a small number of students.

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“Teachers want an accountability system that is fair and accurate — one in which all students are counted and valued,” Neira said. “At the same time, schools that are struggling should get help when they need it and successful schools — and those that are improving — should not be unfairly penalized.”

The NYSUT resolution calls on the federal government to adequately fund the testing and accountability mandates in the law. New York received \$911 million less in funding in 2006 than what Congress authorized when it enacted NCLB in 2002. The Bush administration is proposing a cut in federal education aid for New York in its 2007-08 budget.

Teacher leaders say NYSUT’s surveys of members parallel results released by The Teachers’ Network, a non-profit education group that supports innovative teachers in public schools. The Network, which conducted a nationwide survey on teachers’ views of NCLB, provided NYSUT with New York State results, with 95 percent of teachers saying NCLB’s overemphasis on test scores is narrowing the curriculum.

Data from the Teachers’ Network’s survey of 661 New York teachers reveals:

- 95 percent say the NCLB Act, with its Adequate Yearly Progress goals, encourages teachers to “teach to the test.” Eighty-two percent of teachers report they spend much of their time teaching students what they know will be on state tests.
- 79 percent say the emphasis on testing encourages them to eliminate curriculum material that is not tested. Eighty percent say they spend a lot of time teaching test-taking skills.
- 69 percent believe standardized testing is “necessary,” a nod to the importance of measuring student progress and ensuring the equal opportunities for students promised by NCLB. However, just 34 percent believe the law, as currently constructed, is “beneficial” to students and schools.
- Just 7 percent believe NCLB’s Adequate Yearly Progress requirements for schools are helpful in closing the achievement gap.
- Nearly 90 percent of New York teachers reported feeling pressured — mostly from principals, administrators, school boards and the news media - to raise student test scores.

Survey respondents were evenly distributed across grade levels from kindergarten through grade 12. Slightly more than half (52 percent) were not from schools that had been identified in need of improvement in any academic area or with any disaggregated student population.

Meanwhile, an online survey of 695 English Language Arts teachers by NYSUT’s Research and Educational Services Division, found students, too, feel pressure to succeed and many are “stressed out” by the testing experience:

- A teacher in rural Allegany County reported that as the mandated tests approach, her fourth- and fifth-grade students get very nervous. “Many know that they are doing poorly and it makes them feel bad about themselves,” the teacher said.
- “It is educationally unsound to expect students to learn optimally in a high-stress environment,” said a teacher in Westchester County.
- “The greatest impact was on my ELL student,” said a Rockland teacher, referring to an English language learner. “She was overwhelmed and felt a great sense of failure.”
- “One of my students did not want to come to school because he knew that he had to read on his own and just couldn’t,” said another Westchester teacher, describing a special-needs student subjected to new testing requirements. “He just shut down and cried.”
- “Students seem to be better test-takers, yet they are less academically prepared,” said a Saratoga County teacher. “Many creative activities have been replaced by test preparation.”

More information about NCLB, the surveys and teachers’ attitudes toward the federal law are available at www.nysut.org and www.teachersnetwork.org.

NYSUT represents 575,000 teachers, school-related professionals, academic and professional faculty in higher education, professionals in education and health care and retirees. NYSUT is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers; National Education Association and the AFL-CIO.

New York Results from A SURVEY OF TEACHERS ON NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

March 2007

1. Are you:	Percent Response	Total
Male	18.7%	123
Female	81.3%	535
Total Respondents		658
skipped this question		3

2. Do you consider yourself to be:	Percent Response	Total
Caucasian	78.1%	511
African American	6.9%	45
Native American	0.3%	2
Asian	2.9%	19
Hispanic/Latino	8.3%	54
Other (please specify)	3.5%	23
Total Respondents		654
skipped this question		7

3. How many years have you been a teacher?		
Average:		9.1
Range:		0-37
Total responses		651
Skipped this question		10

4. What is your current teaching assignment? (Check all that apply)	Percent Response	Total
Pre K	2.6%	17
K	9.6%	63
1	11.7%	77
2	10.7%	70
3	12.5%	82
4	12.3%	81
5	12.5%	82
6	13.9%	91
7	14.2%	93
8	14.2%	93
9	19.1%	125
10	19.8%	130
11	17.5%	115
12	14.2%	93
Other	22.7%	149
Total Respondents		656
skipped this question		5

5. How many students do you teach?

Average:	91
Range:	0-3500
Total responses	608
Skipped this question	53

6. If you teach at a secondary level, how many classes do you teach?

Average:	4
Range:	0-20
Total responses	311
Skipped this question	350

7. The public school I teach in is in a community with a population of:

	Percent Response	Total
Less than 1,000	21.8%	136
Between 1,000 and 5,000	7.9%	49
Between 5,000 and 20,000	6.4%	40
Between 20,000 and 50,000	5.3%	33
Between 50,000 and 100,000	4.7%	29
Between 100,000 and 500,000	5.3%	33
Between 500,000 and 1,000,000	4.7%	29
Greater than 1,000,000	44.0%	274
Total Respondents		623
skipped this question		38

9. According to No Child Left Behind mandates, the school I teach in has or has not been identified as a school in need of improvement in any academic area and /or with any disaggregated population of students.

	Percent Response	Total
Has	46.2%	295
Has Not	53.8%	344
Total Respondents		639
skipped this question		22

10. On the following scale, please indicate how you feel about the standardized tests that are being used in your district/school. Are they:

	Not at all	Somewhat	Very
Effective (N=405)	219/54.1%	182/44.9%	4/1.0%
Necessary (N=318)	162/50.9%	203/63.8%	16/5.0%
Useful (N=357)	197/55.2%	156/43.7%	4/1.1%
Valid (N=365)	193/52.9%	169/46.3%	3/0.8%
Important (N=372)	179/48.1%	169/45.4%	24/6.5%
Appropriate (N=361)	216/59.8%	140/38.8%	5/1.4%
Accurate (N=345)	188/54.5%	152/44.1%	5/1.4%
Informative (N=371)	180/48.5%	187/50.4%	4/1.1%
Beneficial (N=382)	254/66.5%	123/32.2%	5/1.3%
Worthwhile (N=371)	262/70.6%	104/28.0%	5/1.3%
Helpful to your teaching (N=418)	308/73.7%	107/25.6%	3/0.7%

11. To what extent, if any, do you feel pressure from the following individuals or groups to improve students' test scores?

	Almost No Pressure	Some Pressure	Quite a Bit of Pressure	A Great Deal of Pressure
Your Principal (N=597)	57/9.5%	167/28.0%	150/25.1%	223/37.4%
Other Teachers (N=594)	217/36.5%	231/38.9%	104/17.5%	42/7.1%
District Administration (N=594)	64/10.8%	93/15.7%	141/23.7%	296/49.8%
Local School Board (N=563)	139/24.7%	117/20.8%	129/22.9%	178/31.6%
Parents (N=596)	183/30.7%	222/37.2%	124/20.8%	67/11.2%
Students (N=595)	295/49.6%	190/31.9%	72/12.1%	38/6.4%
Yourself (N=597)	67/11.2%	142/23.8%	211/35.3%	177/29.6%
Newspaper/Media (N=593)	86/14.5%	128/21.6%	188/31.7%	191/32.2%
State Dept. of Education (N=597)	68/11.4%	74/12.4%	164/27.5%	291/48.7%
U.S. Dept. of Education (N=595)	75/12.6%	82/13.8%	144/24.2%	294/49.4%
No Child Left Behind (N=598)	62/10.4%	77/12.9%	123/20.6%	336/56.2%

12. The following items focus on how your state and district's standardized tests affect your instructional practices, if at all. Please read each item and check the box that best represents how you feel.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
State/district testing encourages me to use rote drill in my teaching. (N=528)	70/13%	121/23%	208/39%	129/24%
State/district testing encourages me to eliminate curriculum material that is not tested. (N=524)	32/6%	79/15%	199/38%	214/41%
State/district testing encourages me to use student inquiry in my teaching. (N=523)	151/29%	234/45%	120/23%	18/3%
State/district testing has changed my instructional practices for the better. (N=523)	247/47%	214/41%	55/11%	7/1%
State/district testing has helped me clarify which learning goals are most important. (N=521)	185/36%	207/40%	115/22%	14/3%
State/district testing encourages me to emphasize the teaching of factual recall knowledge. (N=520)	50/10%	130/25%	247/48%	93/18%
State/district testing encourages me to emphasize deep-level understanding in my teaching. (N=522)	227/43%	215/41%	66/13%	14/3%
State/district testing encourages me to effectively teach students who perform at a high level academically. (N=518)	194/37%	207/40%	94/18%	23/4%
State/district testing encourages me to use explicit instruction. (N=517)	45/9%	94/18%	293/57%	85/16%
State/district testing encourages me to collaborate with other teachers. (N=521)	145/28%	203/39%	150/29%	23/4%
To prepare for state/district testing, I spend a lot of time teaching my students test-taking skills. (N=523)	26/5%	78/15%	200/38%	219/42%
State/district testing encourages me to teach in student-centered ways. (N=521)	206/40%	224/43%	70/13%	21/4%
State/district testing encourages me to effectively teach students who struggle academically. (N=525)	240/46%	174/33%	80/15%	31/6%
State/district testing encourages me to teach critical thinking. (N=525)	214/41%	185/35%	102/19%	24/5%
State/district testing encourages me to teach to standards. (N=522)	57/11%	107/20%	256/49%	102/20%
I spend a lot of time teaching my students content that I know will be on the state/district test. (N=518)	28/5%	62/12%	204/39%	224/43%

13. The following items focus on your opinion/perception of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals. Please select the choice that most closely reflects your opinion/perception.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The NCLB Act with its AYP goals has encouraged teachers to improve their teaching effectiveness with all students. (N=499)	207/41.5%	219/43.69%	66/13.2%	7/1.4%
Publicly publishing test scores and/or schools' progress toward the AYP goals has encouraged teachers to improve their teaching effectiveness. (N=496)	206/41.5%	221/44.6%	64/12.9%	5/1.0%
The NCLB Act with its AYP goals has encouraged the elimination of non-tested curriculum. (N=498)	33/6.6%	50/10.0%	202/40.6%	213/42.8%
The NCLB Act with its AYP goals is helping to reduce the achievement gap in education. (N=498)	293/58.8%	172/34.5%	27/5.4%	6/1.2%
The NCLB Act with its AYP goals encourages teachers to "teach to the test".(N=498)	5/1.0%	21/4.2%	134/26.9%	338/67.9%
The NCLB Act with its AYP goals has contributed to "teacher burnout".(N=490)	13/2.7%	35/7.1%	133/27.1%	309/63.1%
The NCLB Act with its AYP goals is helpful in making sure all students receive a high quality education. (N=497)	284/57.1%	178/35.8%	26/5.2%	9/1.8%
The NCLB Act with its AYP goals empowers teachers to make instructional decisions that are best for their students. (N=497)	312/62.8%	152/30.6%	21/4.2%	12/2.4%
The NCLB Act with its AYP goals encourages teachers to use "best practices" when teaching their students. (N=495)	264/53.3%	170/34.3%	51/10.3%	10/2.0%
The NCLB Act with its AYP goals is an effective way to assess the quality of schools. (N=497)	315/63.4%	155/31.2%	22/4.4%	2/1.0%