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EVENT BRIEF

ETS RELEASE OF *THE FAMILY: AMERICA'S SMALLEST SCHOOL*

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On Monday, the Education Testing Service (ETS) was featured as part of the National Press Club's "Newsmakers" series for the release of their publication *The Family: America's Smallest School*.

PANELISTS

- Kurt Landgraf, Education Testing Service
- Richard Coley, Education Testing Service
- Marc Morial, National Urban League
- Isabel Sawhill, Brookings Institution

SUMMARY

Kurt Landgraf's opening remarks set the tenor of the event and addressed how the family and home "undeniably" impact child growth and development. Co-authored by Richard Coley and Paul Barton, *The Family* examines the family and home experiences that influence children's learning. Coley singled out a few specific factors discussed in the publication that influence children's learning, including single parent families, poverty and resources, parents talking and reading to children, quality day care, and parental involvement in school.

Coley stated that factors like single-parent families, parents reading to children, excessive television watching and school absences, when combined, account for about two-thirds of the large differences among states in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scores.

Prior to discussing the findings in the publication, Coley wanted to be clear that: improving family conditions must be done along *with*—not instead of—education

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reforms; parents must be involved in schools; and that family privacy must be respected when considering proposals or initiatives seeking to improve family conditions.

Findings in the report show that:

- Thirty-two percent of U.S. children live in single-parent homes, up from 23% in 1980.
- Thirty-three percent of children live in families in which no parent has a full-time, year-round job.
- By age 4, children of professional families hear 35 million more words than children of parents on welfare.
- Half of the nation's two-year-olds are in some kind of regular day care. Seventy-five percent are in center-based day care rated of medium- or low-quality. The unequal child care system may be reinforcing and perpetuating achievement gaps in students from the very beginning.
- Forty-four percent of births to women under 30 are out-of-wedlock.
- Nationally, 11 percent of all households are "food insecure." The rate for female-headed households is triple the rate for married families.
- Sixty-two percent of high socio-economic status (SES) kindergartners are read to every day by their parents, compared to 36 percent of kindergartners from low SES groups.
- One in five students misses three days or more of school a month. The United States ranked 25th of 45 countries in students' school attendance.

Marc Morial, president of the National Urban League spoke passionately about his organizations belief that "...education in the 21st Century is a civil right....and a moral imperative." He called for "revolution" across the country in terms of how the country addresses the needs of children. He asserted that every child should have access to high quality early education and that parents be provided help in order to improve. Moriel believes that education reform will not succeed unless the needs of parents and families are addressed.

As a co-author of *Success by 10* released earlier this year by the Brookings Institution, Elizabeth Sawhill is well versed in the needs of children in the home and at school. Expressing her support for *The Family*, she asserted that improvement requires: 1) serious investments in early childhood education; 2) conversations with young people about the responsibilities of parenthood (looking not just at teens, where there has been a successful reduction in the teen pregnancy rates, but also at young adults in their early 20's); and 3) more government responsibility in terms of spending (tax cuts and spending on the elderly and the war is crowding out funding for children).

During the question and answer period, there was a brief discussion of afterschool programs and the role that they can play in assisting students. Sawhill remarked that the

21st Century Community Learning Centers program found in the No Child Left Behind Act did not fare too well under a recently implemented federal assessment tool, but asserted that programs that provide services to students living or attending schools in troubled neighborhoods need more financial support.

Moriel expressed his support for afterschool programs, but suggested that they emphasize providing academic content and other “growth opportunities” to students, versus supporting “...a waiting period before parents get home”.

In terms of NCLB, Moriel asserted that the Urban League wants to see the programs it authorizes fully funded, as well as changes to the law so that supplemental educational services are more readily available to students.

For more information, visit www.ets.org/familyreport.