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******NEWS RELEASE--FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE******

STUDY: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT CAN AND SHOULD CROSS LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Despite obstacles, models exist to increase the engagement of parents whose children are English Language Learners

Contact: M. Beatriz Arias -- (480) 965-6895; bea@asu.edu
Kevin Welner -- (303) 492-8370; kevin.welner@gmail.com

TEMPE, Ariz and BOULDER, Colo., Jan. 28, 2008 -- Parents of English Language Learners face “daunting barriers” to becoming engaged with their children’s schools and education, but schools and policy makers can and should respond with a variety of measures to foster parental involvement, according to a new Policy Brief from the Education Policy Research Unit and the Education and the Public Interest Center.

The brief, “Promoting ELL Parental Involvement: Challenges in Contested Times,” was written by M. Beatriz Arias and Milagros Morillo-Campbell, both of Arizona State University.

English Language Learners (ELLs) account for more than 10% of the student population today in the United States and in the last decade have become increasingly isolated from English proficient students, whom they remain behind on standard measures of achievement.

Given that gap, “it is very important to identify practices that may improve ELL parental involvement and thus student achievement,” Arias and Morillo-Campbell write. “Yet many programs make little effort to promote ELL parental involvement, defining parental involvement only in terms of the schools’ needs or in terms of a deficit-based perception of ELL families.”

After describing today’s ELL population, the two scholars identify five kinds of barriers to greater involvement on the part of parents of ELL students:

- School-based barriers, primarily the view on the part of school officials that ELL parents, in various ways, lack the ability to become involved;
- Parents' lack of English language proficiency;
- Parental educational level;
- Disjunctures between school culture and home culture; and
- Logistical issues, such as work hours and transportation limitations that make it difficult for ELL parents to attend school conferences.

Arias and Morillo-Campbell examine successful models in both the traditional and non-traditional approaches for ELL parental involvement. For example, the Intergenerational Literacy Project (ILP) in Chelsea, Massachusetts, provided classes for adults from different ethnic backgrounds to help them develop their own literacy and to promote family literacy in the home. Parents who participated increased the engagement of their children in literacy activities.

In California, the Proyecto de Literatura Infantil, or Children's Literature Project, helped promote literacy development at home, fostered parents' confidence in their own reading and writing abilities, and helped lead to the creation of networks among parents who took part.

Non-traditional approaches include the Comité de Padres Latinos (COPLA), established by parents in California seeking to understand how the educational system worked. The program brought these parents together with teachers and administrators as the parents sought representation in the school system. It helped to promote dialogue between parents and school and fostered greater outreach, parent advocacy and participation in decision-making. This process increased parent involvement in the school community.

In Arizona, parents whose children were enrolled in a school's Migrant Education Program became involved first by establishing a program to help enrolled children meet basic clothing needs; over time, that effort promoted broader parental involvement and advocacy.

Based in part on these successful programs, Arias and Morillo-Campbell offer a series of recommendations, urging policy makers to consider the following four steps:

- Support culturally and linguistically appropriate parental involvement programs for ELL parents;
- Install non-traditional programs that offer reciprocal involvement by schools and parents;
- Sponsor professional preparation of teachers to work with ELL parents; and
- Provide community-based education to inform parents about school values and expectations and work with parents to help them become advocates for their children.

Find “Promoting ELL Parental Involvement: Challenges in Contested Times,” by M. Beatriz Arias and Milagros Morillo-Campbell on the web at:

<http://epsl.asu.edu/epru/documents/EPsl-0801-250-EPRU.pdf>

CONTACT:

M. Beatriz Arias,
Associate Professor, Curriculum and Instruction
Arizona State University
(480) 965-6895
bea@asu.edu

Kevin Welner, Professor and Director
Education and the Public Interest Center
University of Colorado at Boulder
(303) 492-8370
kevin.welner@gmail.com

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