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CALIFORNIA VOTERS CONCERNED ABOUT PUBLIC EDUCATION'S LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND INFORMATION

Business Champions Lead Call-to-Action

(Sacramento, CA) – California voters are concerned about the state of public education and support increasing accountability and better tools for parents and schools to raise student achievement and close achievement gaps according to survey results released Tuesday by California Business for Education Excellence Foundation.

The opinion poll summary can be downloaded at: <http://www.cbefoundation.org/action.html>.

The survey results¹ were presented during a culminating Town Hall on Closing the Achievement Gap in Sacramento, one of five such events lead by California business leaders.

“California businesses are alarmed by the lack of skills in graduates coming out of high school and based upon our poll results the voting public overwhelmingly share these concerns,” stated Jim Lanich, president of California Business for Education Excellence (CBEE). “Everyone has a vested interest in getting all students to grade level proficiency every year otherwise we set them up for continuous failure either in college or in the workforce.”

Key among the findings of the survey are:

- Voters believe California’s public schools are getting worse, not better
- Voters believe too many school resources are wasted on bureaucracy and administrative costs. More believe the problems in California’s education system are due to a lack of accountability, rather than a lack of funding.
- Voters are aware of an “achievement gap” between students of different ethnicities and economic backgrounds and see it as a serious problem that must be addressed. They are optimistic, however, that the achievement gap can be closed.
- Voters want clear-cut ways to evaluate the success or failure of schools, and they want parents to have more information available to them about school performance, so parents can make informed decisions for their children and also hold schools accountable when students do not perform at grade level.

¹ Telephone survey conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research from February 4-10, 2008, administered to 1,000 registered California voters. The margin of error for the survey was +/- 3.1 percent.

- Voters see testing as a valuable tool in evaluating the performance of students, teachers and administrators.
- Voters strongly support a number of CBEE Foundation's recommendations for improving K-12 public education in California, including making kindergarten mandatory, making school performance data understandable and available to the public, and setting grade-level proficiency expectations for every school.

Leading up to the survey, the CBEE Foundation held five focus groups with high performing school principals and teachers to gain input on the best practices of successful schools and necessary reforms in K-12 public education to bring improvement to scale for every California public school. School leaders were selected from a list of 569 CBEE Foundation Honor Roll schools for 2007 – schools that are reaching and maintaining high levels of student academic achievement and that are closing the achievement gap. More information on the CBEE Foundation Honor Roll and list of schools can be found at www.cbefoundation.org/honor_roll.html.

Focus group participants agreed that high performing schools set higher expectations for every student and do a better job of purposefully connecting teaching and curriculum to the California Content Standards for each grade level and subject. Key to their success is a laser focus on student achievement, measured regularly by student assessments, and a shared accountability by all staff based upon the assessment results.

These school leaders are all reaching high levels of achievement using today's resources, and at the same time can pinpoint specific uses of new money that would produce measurable gains in student achievement. Solutions put forth by these focus group participants on how to help low performing schools included not taking away incentives for schools when they begin to improve and establishing procedures to connect low performing schools with high performing, comparable schools to share what works.

This input from high performing principals and teachers, combined with the voter survey results, set the stage for a call to action led by business leaders at the Sacramento Town Hall. The CBEE Foundation has recruited the support of 20 business executive leaders from five regions of the state to take an active roll in helping close the achievement gap.

“The CBEE Business Champions and 569 high performing Honor Roll schools form a powerful coalition to take on the status quo and challenge our schools to replicate what works to close the achievement gap,” stated Greg Jones, chairman of the CBEE Foundation.

The CBEE Foundation business champions will continue to facilitate peer-to-peer partnerships among low and high performing schools across the state to replicate best practices, while sharing the results with policymakers to make better decisions about how to raise student academic achievement and close achievement gaps.

A list of CBEE Foundation Business Champions for Education and additional background on the survey results are attached to this release.