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New Survey of California Teachers Reveals Serious Problems in Classrooms, Starkly Unequal Conditions for African American, Latino Students, and Broad Teacher Support for Transferring More Control, Accountability from Districts to Schools

Fifty Years After *Brown vs. Board of Education*, Students of Color Still Denied Equal Opportunity to Quality Education in California

Los Angeles, CA— As the 50th anniversary of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling approaches, a new Louis Harris survey of teachers across California offers a sobering look directly from the classrooms: the public school system is struggling with textbooks shortages, overcrowded classrooms, run-down facilities and a serious shortage of qualified teachers. This crisis is especially bleak in schools with high concentrations of African American and Latino students.

“This report from the front lines is sobering: for school children, the California Dream is more like a daily nightmare of crumbling, infested buildings, unqualified teachers and missing textbooks,” said pollster Louis Harris, who directed the survey of 1,056 teachers with the Peter Harris Research Group. “Huge numbers of schools are failing to hire and keep qualified teachers. Textbooks are so scarce kids can’t even take them home to do their homework. Classrooms are severely overcrowded, and the buildings themselves are crumbling and infested with rats and cockroaches.”

Harris noted that these trends are magnified at California schools with a high concentration of African American and Latino students. Compared to schools attended by mostly white students, these schools are:

- 11 times more likely to have a high percentage of under-qualified teachers;
- 73 percent more likely to have evidence of cockroaches, rats or mice;
- 74 percent more likely to lack textbooks for students to use for homework;
- More than 3 times more likely to report that teacher turnover is a serious problem; and
- Twice as likely that teachers rate the working conditions in their school as “only fair” or “poor.”

“Fifty years ago, *Brown v. Board of Education* promised a fair and equal opportunity to learn for every American child,” said John Rogers, Associate Director of UCLA’s Institute for Democracy, Education & Access (IDEA), who provided additional analysis of Harris’s findings at the request of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. “This survey reveals that, here in California, this promise is being broken every day and it’s African-American and Latino students whose opportunities to learn suffer most.”

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Based on the survey results, researchers estimate that about 2 million California students attend public schools without the essential tools for learning: textbooks to take home and a school building free of vermin. One million students attend schools unable to attract and retain an adequate number of qualified teachers. Among the survey's other findings:

- Over half (54 percent) of science teachers report that they do not have enough equipment and materials necessary to do science lab work, such as lab stations, lab tools and materials.
- Half of social studies teachers report that they do not have enough maps, atlases, and reference materials for their students to use or take home.
- Nearly a third (32 percent) of teachers who use textbooks report that there are not enough copies of textbooks for all students to take home.
- Nearly a third (29 percent) of teachers report that they have seen evidence of cockroaches, rats, or mice in their school.
- Thirty-nine percent of teachers rate their facilities as only fair or poor.

Conditions in the classroom have deteriorated in many areas since 2002 when Harris conducted a similar poll, despite the increased emphasis on accountability through standardized testing mandated by the federal and California governments.

For the first time, the survey also shows that two-thirds of California's teachers support a new proposal being discussed in Sacramento that would improve public schools by setting budgets based on individual student needs and giving local schools both authority and accountability, not only for student achievement but also for the opportunities the school provides for teaching and learning.

The Harris survey, conducted between February 12 and March 7, 2004, consisted of 1056 telephone interviews with teachers in California. The survey was commissioned by the Hewlett Foundation as a continuation of its effort to support education research and make high quality information available to the public. Additional analysis was provided by the Institute for Democracy, Education, & Access (IDEA) at the University of California at Los Angeles. IDEA is a premier expert on California's K-12 education system.

According to further analysis by UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, & Access, Los Angeles County schools with 90 percent or more students of color are 2.5 times more likely than schools with a majority of white students to experience 3 to 4 of the following critical opportunity problems:

- Quality Teaching: More than 20 percent of a school's teachers lack a full credential
- Stable Staff: Teachers report that turnover is a problem, positions can't be filled, or school has difficulty finding substitutes
- Essential Instructional Materials: Teachers report a lack of textbooks and materials in their classroom, insufficient textbooks for students to take home, or lack of access to fully useable computer
- Adequate and Safe Facilities: The state identifies a school as critically overcrowded, or teachers rate their facility as poor or only fair, or report evidence of cockroaches, rats, and mice.

Southern California schools outside of Los Angeles County with 90 percent or more students of color are 3.4 times more likely to experience 3 to 4 of the above problems compared to schools with a majority of white students.

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For reporters interested in localizing the story, we can provide references to schools that exemplify opportunity problems.