Ladd Co-chairs Task Force Calling for ‘Broader, Bolder Approach to Education’

Helen F. "Sunny" Ladd, a faculty member of the Center for Child and Family Policy, is co-chair of a task force calling for a "Broader, Bolder Approach to Education." The task force of national policy experts is calling for the end of school reform efforts that have achieved far too little over many decades.

In a statement released in June 2008, the task force charged that schools alone cannot close the achievement gap. The original 60 signers of the statement have now been joined by more than 800 others who endorse the task force’s conviction that school improvement must be complemented by improvements in the social and economic conditions in which children live.

According to the statement, there is evidence that achievement gaps based on socioeconomic status are present before children begin formal schooling. Although some schools serving disadvantaged students have registered impressive academic gains, there is no evidence that school improvement strategies by themselves can effectively close the gaps for the long term. The statement points out that policies aimed directly at education-related social and economic disadvantages can improve school performance and student achievement.

The Broader, Bolder Approach for Education (BBA) aims to produce a large reduction in the current association between social and economic disadvantage and low student achievement by expanding the concept of education and by incorporating effective policies and practices that are supported by serious research.

The task force is designing programs to advance its agenda. Of note, it held a Feb. 26 forum, "New Directions in Accountability Policy for Education," at the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. At the forum, BBA leaders presented and discussed proposals for new accountability systems that it recommends for the federal and state governments. Other forums are being planned, including sessions focusing on the importance of health care for achievement, the impact of early childhood programs and the impact of after-school and summer programs.

BBA also plans to make its Web site, <www.boldapproach.org>, the definitive resource for state and federal policymakers who are looking for research on and evidence for the broader, bolder approach to education.

The task force also will sponsor a series of demonstration projects where school improvement, early childhood programs, adequate health care, and after-school and summer programs will be coordinated to produce real outcome gains for disadvantaged children.
Ladd is the Edgar T. Thompson Distinguished Professor of Public Policy Studies and professor of economics at Duke University. She has written extensively on education policy. Most recently, she co-edited “The Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy” and co-authored, with Edward Fiske, “Elusive Equity: Education Reform in Post-Apartheid South Africa.” She also edited “Holding Schools Accountable: Performance-Based Reform in Education” and co-authored, again with Fiske, “When Schools Compete: A Cautionary Tale.” From 1996-1999, she co-chaired the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Education Finance.

Co-chairing BBA with Ladd are Pedro Noguera and Tom Payzant. Noguera is professor of teaching and learning in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at New York University, executive director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education and co-director of the Institute for the study of Globalization and Education in Metropolitan Settings. Payzant is professor of practice at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He served as superintendent of Boston Public Schools from 1995 to 2006 and was U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education from 1991-1993.

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The Center for Child and Family Policy, which is affiliated with the Social Science Research Institute and the Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy at Duke University, bridges the gap between research and public policy to improve the lives of children and families. For more information on the Center for Child and Family Policy: <www.childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu>.

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