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For Immediate Release:

U.S. Education Department Fails Fastest Growing Student Group

BOULDER, CO ---U.S. students who speak a language other than English at home and are still learning English have received scant support from the federal Department of Education under Secretary Arne Duncan. That is the take-away of the report “Opportunity Lost: The Promise of Equal and Effective Education for Emerging Bilingual Students in the Obama Administration” published this month by the BUENO National Policy Center for Bilingual & Multicultural Education at the University of Colorado.

Fastest Growing Student Group

The BUENO National Policy Center carried out a review of the policies and programs of the Education Department, according to Director Jorge Garcia, because “Emerging Bilingual Students are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. school population. The quality of education they receive will significantly influence our nation’s future success.” In the 1990’s the Emerging Bilingual student population increased by almost 71 percent, and in the decade leading up to the 2008 election it grew by another 53 percent. Emerging Bilingual students now number more than 5.5 million, almost 11 percent of all students, and are projected to constitute one-quarter of the nation’s K -12 school enrollment by 2025.

While the largest number of Emerging Bilingual students attends schools in California, Texas, Florida, New York and Illinois, other states registered proportionately greater growth for this student population during the decade from 1998-2008. South Carolina topped the growth list with an eight-fold increase followed by Indiana with a four-fold increase. The enrollment of Emerging Bilingual students more than doubled between 1998 and 2008 in nine other states: Nevada, Arkansas, North Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

Diverse, Educationally Needy, and Underserved

Emerging Bilingual students are racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse. While nearly three out of four speak Spanish, they speak virtually every world language and many which are indigenous to this country. Native Alaskan, Native American, and

Native Hawaiian languages are the dominant languages of Emerging Bilingual students in Alaska, Hawaii, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota.

While disproportionately poor, Emerging Bilingual students reflect the full ability range of native-English speaking children with some who are gifted and talented and others who have disabilities. Like their English speaking peers, they are expected to learn the academic content taught in our schools. Additionally, they must master a new language, English. For this reason, Emerging Bilingual students have instructional needs which are different and distinctive from those of native-English speaking students.

Regardless of the standards used to determine school success, whether Federal, state, or local, Emerging Bilingual students are poorly served in the nation's schools. In addition to posting low test scores, these students are disproportionately enrolled in special education programs because of misdiagnosis as "learning disabled" or "speech impaired;" are more often forced to repeat grades more frequently than their native English-speaking counterparts; and have a school dropout rate estimated to be twice that of native-English-speaking students.

Lack of Federal Money & Leadership

Education Secretary Duncan claims credit for the largest single infusion of education money in U.S history through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 (ARRA). The ARRA was an \$840 billion program of federal spending and tax cuts that included \$92 billion for education, with \$79.8 billion going to a dozen different K-12 programs.

Not one dollar of the \$79.8 billion of ARRA money for K-12 education, however, was allotted to the federal program which supports Emerging Bilingual students and schools experiencing a recent increase in immigrant student enrollment, Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The Obama Administration's regular budget proposals have been stingy as well. Only two of the five proposed budgets sent to Congress by the President have sought increased funding for ESEA Title III; a \$50 million increase proposed for fiscal year 2011, and a \$16.5 million boost for fiscal year 2012. Today, Title III funding is virtually the same level as it was when President Obama took office – about \$730 million – despite inflation and ongoing population growth. This level of funding works out to approximately \$150 per student.

The Administration's neglect of Emerging Bilingual students is also reflected in its delay in naming an individual to head the U.S. Office of English Language Acquisition. Although this political appointment does not require Senate confirmation, Duncan delayed naming a director for more than one and a half years after he took command of the Education Department. And when that individual resigned, it took almost another year for Duncan to name a replacement. The fact that the Education Department office tasked by Congress with coordinating efforts to help Emerging Bilingual students has been leaderless for longer than it has had a politically-appointed director is telling.

Missing the Role of Language & Education Department Initiatives

The "Opportunity Lost" report documents the Department of Education's dismissal of the role student language plays in education in its handling of a major 2011 report on

achievement gaps. It also explains how Duncan's signature initiative, the \$4 billion Race to the Top program, bypassed almost 75 percent of the Emerging Bilingual students in the country by giving little weight to their needs or the actual performance of states

which applied for funds under this competitive program. The report further provides evidence that Education Secretary Duncan seemed unaware of or unconcerned by Department of Justice evidence showing state-wide non-compliance with federal civil rights laws protecting Emerging Bilingual students by Massachusetts, A Race to the Top Winner that he publicly declared to be "a model for the nation."

Shortage of Teachers Qualified to Instruct Emerging Bilingual Students

The BUENO National Policy Center report documents a severe national shortage of teachers who are prepared to instruct Emerging Bilingual students, a shortage that data collected by the Education Department show worsening. It contrasts the Administration's plans to train 100,000 science, technology, engineering, and mathematics teachers over the next decade with no action to boost the supply of teachers trained to serve Emerging Bilingual students. It also questions the wisdom of awarding a \$50 million grant to Teach for America, a program that provides only five weeks of training before placing college graduates with degrees in fields other than education in classrooms as teachers.

Dimming the Spotlight on Educational Inequity

Secretary Duncan's decision to issue states "flexibility waivers" providing relief from some of the more onerous and controversial provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act was initially well-received. Permitting states "to develop their own plans to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity and improve the quality of instruction" was popular and seemed like a good idea.

Close scrutiny by national civil rights and education reform organizations of the state flexibility plans approved by the Education Department, however, has produced sharp criticism. NCLB required schools to report disaggregated data for the groups of students traditionally "left behind" in U.S. schools. The groups include Emerging Bilingual students, students with disabilities, racial and ethnic minority students, and economically disadvantaged students. In many states operating under the flexibility waivers, it is now impossible to determine how well these historically "disfavored" student groups are being served.

Magnitude of the "Lost Opportunity"

University of Colorado education professor Dr. Kathy Escamilla, principal investigator at the BUENO National Policy Center, says that the Education Department has failed to advance the vision President Barak Obama spoke of during the 2008 campaign – that all American children should become "bilingual, or even trilingual." For Dr. Escamilla, an expert in designing and operating instructional programs which produce fully bilingual and biliterate students, this failure is a national tragedy. "Students are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential, and as a result, the nation's economic strength and security are compromised."

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