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**SURVEY OF ALBANY PARENTS:  
STRONG SUPPORT FOR “NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND” OPTIONS**

A startling 71 percent of the parents in three poorly performing Albany public schools do not realize that their children are attending schools on the State Education Department’s roster of failing public schools, according to a new survey of Albany parents. The federal No Child Left Behind Act, signed into law one year ago, grants children in failing public schools the right to transfer to better schools or receive free tutoring and other supplemental educational services.

“If parents don’t know their children are attending a failing school, then they are not likely to avail themselves of the federal right to transfer to a better public school or the right to free tutoring services,” explained Tom Carroll, the project director for the Brighter Choice Public School Choice Project. Carroll also serves as the chairman of the Brighter Choice Charter Schools.

The state released its “failing school” list at the beginning of the current school year, and designated three Albany schools as failing: Arbor Hill Elementary School, William S. Hackett Middle School, and Philip Livingston Magnet Middle School.

The first-ever survey of Albany parents with children in failing schools was commissioned by the Brighter Choice Public School Choice Project, an Albany-based project. The project is funded through a \$4.4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

Once told that their children presently are attending a failing school, 79 percent indicated that they would transfer their children to another school and 92 percent said they would seek the free tutoring services to which they are entitled under federal law. Based on the latest published student data for the three failing schools, this means that approximately 1,600 students would transfer to a better school and approximately 1,800 students would seek free tutoring and other supplemental services.

“These results underscore the need for a much more aggressive campaign to inform Albany parents about their rights under the No Child Left Behind Act,” said Carroll.

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A plurality of parents identified “improving our schools” as the number one priority facing Albany, surpassing crime, jobs and the economy, and property taxes.

For Albany’s almost 1,300 middle-school students, the New Covenant Charter School is the only existing alternative to the district’s two failing middle schools, yet New Covenant does not have the capacity to serve this number of additional students.

“With a planned new middle school mired in neighborhood politics, the district needs to consider the full array of options under the No Child Left Behind Act,” explained Tom Carroll. “Students can’t be left trapped in state-designated failing schools.”

Under federal No Child Left Behind regulations, districts that offer only failing schools at particular grade levels face several options: converting a failing district school into a charter school (an option specifically authorized under New York’s charter-school law); creating new or alternative schools to serve the same grades; restructuring failing schools; providing supplemental services; or establishing agreements with neighboring school districts to transfer students to better public schools in neighboring districts.

According to the survey, one popular alternative to Albany’s failing public schools is the creation of additional charter schools. By a 2-to-1 margin, parents favored the creation of more charter schools in Albany. A majority also favored converting Albany’s failing public schools into charter schools “as a way to provide a better education to Albany’s students.” Assemblyman John McEneny, for example, previously suggested converting a poorly performing district school in Albany into a charter school.

By an almost 3-to-1 margin, parents voiced support for the innovative Brighter Choice Charter School, which opened this year. The school offers a 9-to-5 school day, 200-day extended school year, separate classes for boys and girls, computers in every classroom, expert teachers for each academic subject, extensive art and music programs, a brand new state-of-the-art school building, and school uniforms.

The survey was conducted by *the polling company*<sup>TM</sup>, *inc.*, headed by Kellyanne Conway, with offices in New York City and Washington, D.C. Other clients of *the polling company*<sup>TM</sup>, *inc.* include *New York* magazine, *National Journal’s Hotline*, *The New York Post*, *Ladies Home Journal*, Spelling Entertainment, Major League Baseball, Grocery Manufacturers of America, Safeway Stores, and The Limited, Inc.

A total of 274 parents in Albany were interviewed from January 7 to January 13, 2003. This included only parents of children attending William S. Hackett Middle School, Philip Livingston Magnet Middle School, or Arbor Hill Elementary School. The margin of error for the overall survey data is +/- 5.2% at the 95% confidence level, meaning that the results obtained would differ by no more than 5.2 percentage points in either direction if the entire population of parents with children enrolled in the three designated schools had been surveyed.

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