

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Melissa Heaton  
206-679-9655

## **Poll of African American and Latino citizens reveals strong support for Washington Assessment of Student Learning**

--

*Students need even higher levels of academic preparation, respondents tell Partnership for Learning*

**SEATTLE - June 1, 2006** – A solid majority of the state’s Latinos and African Americans believe that students should pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) – or an equally rigorous alternative – in order to earn a high school diploma, according to a new survey released today by Partnership for Learning.

The Partnership – a nonprofit organization that has helped educate parents and the general public about the state’s school improvement effort for the past decade – **found that 72 percent of Latino citizens and 62 percent of African American citizens** believed that a diploma should be awarded only after passing the WASL or an alternative.

Support rose even higher among respondents in both groups when people learned of supports for students that are now in place – including multiple opportunities to re-take the WASL, \$28 million in new state money for targeted academic assistance, exemptions for students with disabilities and alternatives to the WASL. Support **rose to 86 percent of Latinos and 80 percent of African Americans** – a jump of 14 percent and 18 percent respectively – when respondents learned of the additional support.

Moreover, 81 percent of Latinos and 83 percent of African American respondents said they would support this requirement even if they had a child who did not pass the WASL on the first try.

These results are similar to a 2005 statewide poll of the general public conducted by the Partnership.

Beginning with the graduating class of 2008, students will have to demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics to earn a Washington diploma. These students took the 10<sup>th</sup>-grade WASL this spring and will receive their scores in mid June.

“It’s a competitive world and our kids of color need the tools to be successful once they graduate from high school,” said Craig Dawson, President of Retail Lockbox. “These findings recognize that fact and underscore the need to step up our efforts on behalf of these students.”

When asked what level of education they believe will be necessary for students to secure a job that enables them to support a family, 77 percent of Latinos and 82 percent of African American said students would need *at least* two years of education or training beyond the high school diploma.

James Kelly, president of the Seattle Urban League, said the survey results reflect a belief that the academic bar must be set high for all students, regardless of race or economic circumstance.

“We can’t lower education standards because that doesn’t represent the reality of the world we live in,” Kelly said. “We need to strongly encourage all students, *especially* our African American and

other students of color, to take rigorous courses throughout high school so they are better prepared for college, work and life.”

#### **Other key findings from the survey:**

##### ***College ready the goal***

- 76 percent of the African Americans and 66 percent of the Latinos surveyed said they support the notion that the skills and knowledge necessary for success at work after high school are essentially the same as those needed for success in college. So that “college readiness” should be the goal for every student, whether or not they plan to go to college after high school.

##### ***Concerns that were raised***

- While supportive of the standards and not wanting to see them lowered, 69 percent of the African American respondents said students are currently not being adequately prepared. That number increased to 75 percent when asked specifically about preparation for students of color.
- The responses were split among the Latinos with 47 percent reporting that schools are adequately preparing students and 46 percent saying they are not adequately preparing students.
- When given four options and asked to choose the biggest barrier to the success of students of color in high school, 32 percent of the African Americans cited the lack of a caring adult to support a student’s learning, 25 percent said that the curriculum is not relevant to the student, 20 percent said it was the low adult expectations of student’s academic potential and 16 percent said that the high school curriculum is not challenging enough.
- When given the same four options, Latinos cited high school curriculum that is not challenging enough as the most significant challenge (26 percent). Lack of a caring adult (21 percent), curriculum that is not relevant or interesting to the student (20 percent) and low adult expectations (20 percent) were also cited as big concerns.

“There has been a lot of debate about the WASL over the past ten years, when what we should be talking about is preparing every student for work and college” said Richard Esparza, principal of Granger High School in Yakima County. “There is no denying the fact that today’s world is much more competitive and it requires high school graduates to have skills beyond the WASL to be successful. That’s the real message here.”

The poll of African American and Latino citizens was a random statewide survey. It was conducted by the opinion research firm Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall (DHM). A total of 500 people were surveyed; 250 African American and 250 Latino citizens. The margin of error for this poll was +/- 6.2 percent. In gathering survey responses, DHM pre-tested the questionnaire, callbacks and verifications. In addition, DHM translated the poll into Spanish and employed pollsters that were bilingual. More polling data is available at [www.partnership4learning.org](http://www.partnership4learning.org).

- end -

#### **About Partnership for Learning**

*Partnership for Learning is a statewide nonprofit organization that communicates to educators, parents, businesses, elected officials and civic leaders about the state’s school improvement efforts and the need to better prepare all of our high school graduates for the demands of today’s global society. For more information, visit Partnership for Learning’s Web site at: [www.partnership4learning.org](http://www.partnership4learning.org).*