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For Immediate Release

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CER PRESIDENT WELCOMES EDUCATION SECRETARY'S SUPPORT FOR SMALLER SCHOOLS, HIGHER STANDARDS

(September 21, 1999) Showing the power of good research and reform ideas which The Center for Education Reform [CER] has driven into the public's minds, Education Secretary Dick Riley has endorsed the need for smaller schools and urged all schools to make advanced courses available to all students.

"We welcome the Secretary's endorsement of these important structural reforms. It is clear that this new era of choice and charter schools is sparking bold action on the part of education officials like Riley," said CER president Jeanne Allen. "We urge him, however, not to assume that additional federal money and mandates will actually bring these reforms about."

Instead, Allen offered several recommendations that federal and state policymakers can enact to ensure that children have access to smaller, more effective schools:

- Expand the numbers of charter schools by encouraging states to strengthen their laws, rather than be satisfied with moderate to weak laws that spawn only a few new schools.
- Ensure that federal money for disadvantaged children (such as Title 1) be portable to schools that offer advanced courses for all children, thereby creating an incentive for schools to use existing funds to restructure the courses and curricula they now use.
- Institute consequences for schools that fail in two consecutive years by allowing parents to seek tutors and alternative learning environments.
- Adopt alternative certification programs that allow qualified professionals into the classroom, rather than federally prescribed certification requirements.
- At the state level, open up the textbook adoption process to ensure that all publishers have access to school business.

"These are but a few changes in American education that can lead to higher standards and smaller schools within a short time," Allen cautioned. "But relegating these concerns to the federal level by creating more nationally mandated programs will only raise false hopes and disappoint children in the long run. Federal money, or its withdrawal, can be a powerful incentive if used properly—to encourage the state and local development of responsible solutions."

For more information about CER's reform efforts, call (202) 822-9000 or send email to cer@edreform.com.