



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW STUDY FINDS SIGNIFICANT GAP IN THE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OF CHILDREN LIVING IN NYCHA PUBLIC HOUSING

Research released today shows that children living in NYCHA public housing developments perform less well on standardized math and reading tests than other students, even after controlling for the characteristics of the individual students and the schools they attend. The study looks also at the characteristics of the schools NYCHA youth attend, and evaluates whether the neighborhood where NYCHA housing is located has an impact on the performance of the students that live there.

New York, NY (November 24, 2008) – A new study released today by NYU’s Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy and the Institute for Education and Social Policy examines the school performance of children living in public housing managed by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) and compares their educational outcomes with the outcomes of other students who do not live in public housing. Even controlling for differences in race, gender, nativity status, and school characteristics, the study finds that 5th grade students living in public housing perform worse on standardized tests than those living elsewhere. The study uses data from NYCHA on the location of public housing developments and uses data from the Department of Education on the characteristics and performance of public schools and their students for the 2002 – 2003 school year.

“While we don’t know exactly why this performance gap exists, we do know that it is unacceptable,” said Vicki Been, director of the Furman Center. “These findings should sound an alarm to the education community and the housing community that they need to come together to better understand the causes of this gap, and to think through possible remedies.”

In addition to looking at the performance gap, the study finds that public school students living in NYCHA housing are concentrated in a handful of schools half of the elementary school-aged students in public housing attend just 10% of the City’s elementary schools, or 83 schools. The peers at the average school that NYCHA students attend are more likely to be non-white, poor and to perform worse on standardized tests. Specifically, 38% of students in the average school attended by NYCHA students pass their reading exams, and just 41% pass their math exams. In the average school attended by non-NYCHA students, on the other hand, almost 50% pass their reading exams, while nearly 52% pass their math exams. This is significant because research suggests that a student’s academic performance is shaped in part by the performance of his or her peers.

“This is a considerable population we are talking about—one out of every nine public school students lives in NYCHA housing,” said Amy Ellen Schwartz, director of the Institute for Education and Social Policy. “Our findings require the City and education community to take notice. Whether it’s working with the Department of Education to develop ways to target assistance or

enrichment programs to kids living in NYCHA, or partnering with non-profits to bring new resources and opportunities, more must be done to meet the needs of these kids.”

The study looks also at the performance of NYCHA youth at the high school level, and finds a similar but somewhat smaller gap: 53% of NYCHA students taking the Math Regents pass the exam, compared to 60% of other students. Similarly, about 70% of NYCHA students taking the English Regents pass, while slightly over 75% of other students pass. Finally, the research proves that the neighborhood context matters even within the NYCHA population; NYCHA students living in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty tend to do worse in school than those living in lower-poverty neighborhoods.

“Research and policy debates on public housing tend to be focused on moving residents out of public housing, rather than on the well-being of residents living in public housing,” commented Ingrid Gould Ellen, co-director of the Furman Center. “While the New York City Housing Authority has a long history of responsible stewardship, we think these findings demonstrate the need for increased vigilance about the resources and opportunities afforded to existing residents.”

This study was funded by the Independence Community Foundation.

The policy brief can be found at: <http://furmancenter.nyu.edu/>. For more information, contact Amy Armstrong at 212-998-6697 or armstrong@exchange.law.nyu.edu.

About the Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy

The Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy is a joint research center of the New York University School of Law and the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at NYU. Since its founding in 1995, the Furman Center has become the leading academic research center in New York City dedicated to providing objective academic and empirical research on the legal and public policy issues involving land use, real estate, housing and urban affairs in the United States, with a particular focus on New York City. More information about the Furman Center can be found at www.furmancenter.nyu.edu.

About the Institute for Education and Social Policy

The Institute for Education and Social Policy (IESP) conducts non-partisan scientific research about U.S. education and related social policy issues to help inform educational institutions and policymakers about the effectiveness of instructional programs, the impact of school reform initiatives and the relationships between academic achievement, school finance and socio-economic and demographic factors such as poverty, ethnicity and immigration status. Faculty, research staff and doctoral students at IESP share an interest and commitment to educational improvement. Current research topics include school finance, education of poor, non-white and immigrant students, small schools, after school programs, school accountability, teacher labor markets, school reform, and relationships among schools, neighborhoods and the health, housing and work patterns of communities. A part of the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, IESP was founded in 1995 as a partnership between Steinhardt, the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. More information about IESP can be found at: www.steinhardt.nyu.edu/iesp.