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Pacific Research Institute Study Shatters Myth that “Good” Schools Are Found in “Nice” Neighborhoods

San Francisco—The Pacific Research Institute (PRI), a non-partisan think tank, today announced the release of a ground-breaking study on the performance of students in predominantly middle-class/non-low-income public schools in Illinois. “Not as Good as You Think: Why Middle-Class Parents in Illinois Should Be Concerned about Their Local Public Schools,” found that of 1,156 Illinois middle-class/non-low-income public schools, in 140 or 12 percent of the schools, more than half of the students in at least one grade level performed below proficiency on the 2013 Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in English-language-arts or math. Some of these schools are located in Illinois’s well-to-do neighborhoods.

Also, among the 1,156 middle-class/non-low-income public schools, 817 have at least one grade where the subject-matter proficiency rate on the ISAT was below the average performance of schools with similar levels of low-income students.

Research shows that parents are willing to purchase houses that stretch their means for what they believe is an opportunity to send their children to “good” public schools. *Not as Good as You Think* shatters the myth that buying a home in an expensive neighborhood also necessarily buys a “good” public school. “While many middle-class parents recognize the need for reform in schools located in poor, urban neighborhoods, they are often under the mistaken impression that because they live in safe, well-to-do neighborhoods, the schools attended by their own children are high performing,” said Lance T. Izumi, senior director of Education Studies at PRI and co-author of the study.

The study looks at regular public schools where one-third or fewer of the students are classified as low income. The study provides school-by-school data on the proficiency rates of students on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test English-language-arts and math exams, school test performance relative to the average for schools with students of the same income status, and the median price of the homes in the neighborhood.

“The findings of the study clearly demonstrate that families in poor, urban neighborhoods aren’t the only ones who should be concerned about their children’s schools,” said Mr. Izumi. “The results should cause middle-class parents to rethink their views on the quality of their neighborhood public school, and, consequently, to open their minds to other education options, choices, and policy changes that would allow their children to escape underperforming schools and attend better-performing alternatives,” he added.

Not as Good as You Think: Why Illinois Parents Should Be Concerned about Their Local Public Schools by Lance Izumi with Alicia Chang is available at www.pacificresearch.org. An interactive page allows visitors to view the results for a particular school. To arrange an interview with Lance Izumi, contact PRI’s Press Office at 415/955-6123 or ritchon@pacificresearch.org or ldannerbeck@pacificresearch.org.

About PRI

For 35 years, the Pacific Research Institute (PRI) has championed freedom, opportunity, and individual responsibility through free-market policy solutions. PRI is a non-profit, non-partisan organization. Visit its website at www.pacificresearch.org