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Commercialism in Education Research Unit

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

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ANNUAL REPORT ON SCHOOLHOUSE COMMERCIALISM FINDS IN-SCHOOL ADVERTISING IS INCREASINGLY CONTROVERSIAL

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TEMPE, Ariz. (Monday, November 28, 2005) —Criticism of schoolhouse commercialism is on the rise, according to new research from the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU) at Arizona State University.

Empty Calories: Commercializing Activities In America's Schools, authored by Alex Molnar and David Garcia, is CERU's Eighth Annual Report on Schoolhouse Commercialism Trends. The report documents an upsurge in both citizen opposition and government attempts to regulate at least some aspects of schoolhouse commercialism. The focus of this opposition has largely been in the area of children's health, and has revolved around the sales of soft drinks and junk foods in schools. Commercialism associated with children's health issues account for the largest number of citations recorded in this year's report.

As efforts increase to rein in marketing in schools, corporations are fighting to retain their foothold, the study reports. As a consequence, government officials who are attempting to pass laws or implement regulations limiting corporations from selling so-called foods of minimal nutritional value find themselves labeled as "Nazis" or "communists."

"Overheated rhetoric and deep-pockets lobbying are two illustrations of how controversial advertising in schools has become," the report observes. "As a result, those who benefit from it are fighting harder than ever to retain their access to the nation's schoolchildren."

Empty Calories describes a wide variety of schoolhouse commercialism programs and activities. They include "Field Trip Factory," which provides schools with "free" field trips to retail establishments that, in turn, have paid Field Trip Factory for the exposure; exclusive contracts with soft-drink manufacturers, who gain access to student consumers who patronize soda vending machines; and a plethora of corporate school curriculum

materials, often self-serving or one-sided in their promotion of corporate products or corporate positions on public policy.

One example cited is a six-week lesson plan from Marvel Enterprises for grades two through four consisted of a Fantastic Four comic book aimed at promoting student self-esteem—a program that was, as *Daily Variety* reported, mainly a promotion of the summer movie *The Fantastic Four*.

Fiscal pressures on America's public schools help contribute to the continued spread of commercialism, the report notes. It also found, however, that areas where student health and nutrition are directly affected, state and local governments and citizen activists are pushing hard to rein in commercial ventures.

CERU's Annual Report on Schoolhouse Commercialism Trends measures media references to a variety of search terms in eight broad categories of schoolhouse commercialism. This year's report measured such references and the references for two supplemental searches for the period from July 1, 2004, through June 30, 2005. The categories and supplemental searches, the number of citations, and percentage of the total citations that number represents are:

- 1. Corporate Sponsorship of school programs and activities: 1,524 (25.7% of all citations)**
- 2. Exclusive Agreements: 361 (6.1% of all citations)**
- 3. Incentive Programs: 118 (2% of all citations)**
- 4. Appropriation of Space: 357 (6% of all citations)**
- 5. Sponsored Educational Materials: 376 (6.3% of all citations)**
- 6. Electronic Marketing: 213 (3.6% of all citations)**
- 7. Privatization: 592 (10% of all citations)**
- 8. Fundraising: 302 (5.1% of all citations)**
- 9. Children's Health (supplemental search): 1,901 (32% of all citations)**
- 10. Commercialism (supplemental search): 185 (3.1% of all citations)**

Find this document on the web at:

http://www.asu.edu/educ/eps/CERU/CERU_2005_Annual_Report.htm

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The Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU) conducts research, disseminates information, and helps facilitate a dialogue between the education community, policy makers, and the public at large about commercial activities in schools. CERU is the only national academic research center dedicated to schoolhouse commercialism.

Visit the CERU website at <http://schoolcommercialism.org/>

The Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL) at Arizona State University offers high quality analyses of national education policy issues and provides an analytical resource for educators, journalists, and citizens. It includes the Arizona Education Policy Initiative (AEPI), the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU), the Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU), and the Language Policy Research Unit (LPRU). The EPSL is directed by Professor Alex Molnar.

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