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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:
Brad Wills
Wills & Associates
301-767-1919 / bwills@wills-pr.com

“Listening to Democracy's Next Generation” Web Dialogue on Public Policy Launched to Connect Fairfax County, Virginia Students and Virginia’s Government Officials

Program developed with the cooperation of Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia Delegate Kristen Amundson, NVTC’s Equal Footing Foundation, and WestEd

HERNDON, VA—January 30, 2007—With the ultimate goal of creating stronger ties between Virginia’s students and their government officials on public policy issues, today an interactive web-based dialogue called **“Listening to Democracy's Next Generation”** went live on the Internet to reach high school students at two Fairfax County, Virginia schools, West Potomac and Mt. Vernon High School. This program, which will run January 30 - February 2, will concentrate on three key discussion topics about the Virginia budget—transportation, human services, and education.

“Our youth are less engaged in what government does, or should be doing, and I want to change that. On the flip side, elected officials need to be better connected to what our youth are thinking about how government works, and how they can encourage them to get more involved,” said Delegate Kristen J. Amundson, Democrat from Virginia’s 44th district in Fairfax County, and the leading government official behind this program.

“Because young people today learn so much using digital technologies and the Internet, I decided that WestEd’s Web Dialogue would be the ideal way to engage the next generation of voters in these discussions.”

Seniors from two Fairfax County schools, West Potomac and Mt. Vernon High School, will be logging onto the **Listening to Democracy's Next Generation** Web Dialogue for four days this week for conversations with a variety of government officials to discuss issues related to transportation, human services, and education. Besides Delegate Amundson, other participants include: Delegate Tom Rust (R), Delegate Bob Brink (D), Doug Koelemay, member of the Commonwealth Transportation Board, and Isis Castro, member of the State Board of Education.

The Equal Footing Foundation, a Fairfax-based foundation focused on youth development and education is sponsoring the program through two key channels. First, through financial support with the help of the Northern Virginia Technology Council, and secondly by expanding the initiative into a community based after school program. Through the Gums Springs Community Center Computer Clubhouse, (one of six computer clubhouses in the area) students from both schools will be able to access technology after school to directly connect with government officials and to discuss their concerns with their peers. "The Computer Clubhouse program delivers an adventure in education and this joint-partnership helps to bridge emerging technology with traditional educational curriculum," said Colleen Hahn, President and Executive Director of the Equal Footing Foundation. "Through this effort, the entire partnership hopes to expand this program into other Computer Clubhouses and schools in the area."

WestEd, the California-based nonprofit whose mission is to improve education and youth development within schools, families, and communities, has created the Web Dialogue technology being used for "Listening to Democracy's Next Generation." "We are extremely enthusiastic about this program, and the strong participation we see from all the partners involved," said Laurie Maak, WestEd's Web Dialogue manager. "We see web dialogues as an important frontier for the nation's civic education. When students have the opportunity to learn about issues that are important to them and to discuss relevant policies with lawmakers and government officials, we believe those young people will become informed and engaged members of our society." WestEd produces additional Web Dialogues nationally to connect youth with government officials.

About Equal Footing Foundation

Equal Footing Foundation is a Virginia based 501(C)(3) nonprofit focused on youth development and education. The Foundation's goal is to provide an equal opportunity environment where youth can access the tools needed to successfully compete in a skilled and educated workforce. **To achieve this goal, Equal Footing Foundation funds, launches and sustains Computer Clubhouses in partnership with local governments, businesses and other non-profit entities. These Computer Clubhouse programs are centrally located within established community centers, in close proximity to schools and bus routes for easy after school access.** The result is an innovative and safe after-school learning center where children ages 8-18, many of whom do not have access to technology at home, work with adult mentors to learn, develop, and explore their potential.

About WestEd

WestEd, a national nonprofit research, development, and service agency, works with education and other communities to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults. WestEd has 14 offices nationwide, from Washington and Boston to Arizona and California. Its corporate headquarters are in San Francisco. More information about WestEd is available at WestEd.org. For more information on Web Dialogues can be found at www.webdialogues.net.