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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**MESSAGE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT,
NUMBER OF GRADUATES, DECLINES FOR
FIRST TIME IN NEARLY A DECADE**

(Evergreen, Colo., April 4) – After nearly a decade of growth, massage school student enrollments and graduations have declined from 2004 to 2006, even as the number of training programs for massage therapists grew during that period, according to new research by Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals (ABMP). The biennial research has been conducted by ABMP since 1998.¹

Enrollment has declined 9.8 percent from 73,933 entrants in 2004 to 66,653 in 2006. Graduates from massage therapy programs in 2006 totaled 62,784, versus 71,272 graduates in 2004, a decline of slightly less than 12 percent.

“While on the surface these census results may appear troubling to some in the massage community, ABMP considers this a healthy market correction,” says Les Sweeney, nationally certified massage therapist and ABMP president. “With our school-relations program, which has included visits to more than 1,000 schools, and regular contact with massage educators, we were aware of a leveling off in the rapid school-enrollment trend. We are neither surprised nor dismayed by the results.”

Other recent ABMP research conducted by Harstad Strategic Research has shown continuing growth in consumer demand for massage.²

“Our broad perspective is that the massage training universe may have overreacted to the growing consumer demand,” Sweeney says. “Some excellent training programs already in the market expanded and other well-thought-out programs emerged. But programs also emerged that were less well-planned and more motivated by the trendiness of massage training.”

With a U.S. massage therapist population of 250,000 professionals, the entrance of another 70,000 massage graduates to the field each year was not sustainable, according to Sweeney.

“Taking the long view, the number of 2006 massage school graduates represents a two-thirds increase over the 1998 school census, a jump from 37,625 graduates to 62,784,” Sweeney said.

While the number of massage therapy schools continued to grow over the last two years, it slowed considerably, from an increase of 7.8 percent in 2004, compared with a 35.5 percent gain in the number of schools from 2002 to 2004. Sweeney attributed the earlier growth to a bandwagon effect that led to an excess of programs.

“This slowing of total school growth is especially telling,” Sweeney says. “It would not be surprising to see a further reduction in the number of massage training programs during the next few years. The landscape has become more competitive. Those with quality instruction, passion for the field, and effective student recruitment and support are more likely to thrive.”

ABMP’s school database peaked at 1,582 schools in 2006, but early 2007 survey results showed 52 of those schools were no longer offering massage programs.

ABMP serves the massage, bodywork and somatic therapy professions and is devoted to promoting ethical practices, fostering acceptance of the professions and protecting the rights of legitimate massage and bodywork practitioners.

Representing more than 58,000 members, ABMP is headquartered in Evergreen, Colo. ABMP is employee owned and is the largest massage therapy membership association in the nation.

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¹ State-approved massage therapy programs were e-mailed a questionnaire in January, 2007. Non-respondents received no fewer than three follow-up phone calls, yielding responses from 72.6 percent of schools, a total of 1,111. The same methodology has been used in the surveys since 1998.

² www.massagetherapy.com/_content/media/Increaseinpopularity.pdf

School Enrollment and Graduation, 1998-2006

