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**STATEMENT ON THE NATION'S REPORT CARD:
NAEP 2009 Science Trial Urban District Assessment –
Grades 4 and 8**

**Dr. Arthur Eisenkraft
Distinguished Professor of Science Education
Director, Center of Science and Math in Context (COSMIC),
University of Massachusetts Boston**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) science scores for 17 urban districts provide another window into the landscape of our science education. The view is not pretty. In two high-achieving urban districts, for example, nearly one-third of students still scored below the *Basic* achievement level. In another district, three-quarters of students scored below *Basic*. Overall, only about 1% of our students scored at the *Advanced* level. Yet, many of these same students pass their science classes and perform well on their states' science tests.

I believe that we see such a large disparity between the NAEP scores and our state and local tests because the NAEP assessment asks students to do more than “identify science principles.” They must also demonstrate that they can “use science principles” and “use scientific inquiry.” In addition, some NAEP items require students to bridge science, technology and engineering design.

My biggest fear is that local communities across the country will ignore The Nation's Report Card. We will reassure ourselves that the nation may be at risk, but that *our* schools are OK. We do this all the time. On average, Americans are overweight, but *my* extra 10 pounds aren't part of the problem. On average, the nation's students are not demonstrating the science competence we need for America to continue to be a leading nation, but *my* students aren't part of the problem.

If we want to fix science education nationally, we need to change how science is taught locally. We must first ensure that science truly is taught to every student in every grade. Then the policymakers in our states need to create assessments that reflect the most important principles in science, not just what is easy to measure. Our teachers need curriculum materials and professional development that support quality instruction, not just what is easy to teach. And our students need to be taught how to ask and answer essential questions of science concepts—“What does it mean?”; “How do we know?”; “Why do we believe it's science?”; and “Why should we care?”

The problems of science education have been identified before. It seems that we rediscover them on a regular basis. The NAEP scores reveal that some schools and some students have found a way to thrive. We have to find these pockets of success and learn from them. The schools, teachers and students who have found a way to success may help us start to address the problems that are holding other students back.

If we can learn from their experiences and act with urgency, we may see real improvements—not only in the next round of NAEP testing, but, more important, in the lives and futures of our children and our country.