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**STATEMENT ON THE NATION'S REPORT CARD:
*NAEP 2011 Mathematics and Reading***

**KEITH W. RHEAULT
Nevada Superintendent of Public Instruction**

Thank you for inviting me to comment today on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) reports on reading and mathematics.

I was pleased to receive the invitation for two reasons. It gives me a chance to discuss what we are doing in education in Nevada at a difficult time. It also provides the opportunity to talk about the value of NAEP in helping us understand how well we are doing and how our students compare to others across the country.

As you may know, during the current recession Nevada has become number one in the nation in some pretty dismal statistics. The state is number one in foreclosures, and median housing prices are down by more than half since the boom years of 2006–2007, which is the largest drop in the nation. Nevada has the highest state unemployment rate—13.4 percent in September—and the number one bankruptcy rate. Our resort and gaming industries have been hit hard by the recession, and construction, which boomed in the early 2000s, has gone bust.

All this has meant that property tax collections are down, the state budget has been cut, the teaching force has been reduced, and spending on K-12 education has been cut by several hundred million dollars since 2008.

However, in spite of all these problems, our state has continued to make gains on NAEP in both math and reading in most years. The improvements have been steady, not spectacular, but over the past eight years, they have added up to quite a bit. Nevada is still below the national averages, but since 2003, we have gained on the averages in both grades and both subjects. We still rank in the bottom quarter of the states in average scores, but compared to 2003, the first year all states participated in NAEP, Nevada ranks in the top quarter of the states in making gains.

Over the past two years, from 2009 to 2011, eighth graders in Nevada's public schools have made statistically significant gains in both reading and math. The report shows that our fourth graders had two-point increases in both subjects, but according to the NAEP statisticians, these were still within the margin of error on the test.

I think our fourth graders have been helped by the federal Reading First Program, which has been phased out, and last year our early reading program was the only one in the country to get an extra federal grant. Even with the budget reductions, we have continued to implement our state standards, and we have continued to get some positive results.

As a direct result of the funding cuts, Nevada eliminated the standardized test we had used to compare ourselves to the rest of the nation. Instead, we now rely on NAEP and its representative samples, and both NAEP and our state tests have been showing an upward trend. If NAEP and our own tests weren't moving in the same direction, we would have to explain what's going on to the state legislature, as we should.

Like most of the states, Nevada has set our state standards at about the *Basic* achievement level on NAEP. Our results on the Nevada criterion-referenced tests and at the *Basic* level on NAEP have moved pretty much the same way. At eighth grade, 67 percent of Nevada students have reached the NAEP *Basic* achievement level in math, and 69 percent have reached the *Basic* level in reading. That's not nearly good enough, but we have been making gains.

Nevada is part of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, and in 2014–2015 we plan to start using their version of the Common Core State Standards exams. But I'm sure we will continue to be part of NAEP, too, because we will continue to need the independent check that NAEP provides to see whether we're doing a good job.

Overall, I am pleased with the news NAEP is giving us this year, but I'm still far from satisfied. These improvements during tough times show we are beating some of the odds, but we are still pretty far from where we ought to be.