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**STATEMENT ON THE NATION'S REPORT CARD:  
*Grade 12 Reading and Mathematics 2009***

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Greetings from Louisville Kentucky, where I am joining you remotely from the site of the annual policy forum of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), for which I serve as president. I am pleased to speak with you today on such an important and unique report. As was mentioned before, this NAEP Report Card marks the first time that NAEP has released 12th grade state-level results for mathematics and reading. As you also have heard, this report features a pilot of 11 states that voluntarily participated. As the West Virginia state superintendent of schools, I believe I speak for everyone in our state when I say we are proud to be one of those 11 states.

The 12th grade NAEP state pilot has given West Virginia an opportunity to begin gauging whether our 12th graders are college and career ready. When our high school seniors took the pilot test a year ago, our state department of education had just launched its 21st century teaching and learning vision—Global21. This initiative includes, among other things, a universal pre-K program, a more rigorous curriculum that meets national and international standards and incorporates 21st century performance skills, and tougher graduation requirements. Senior year is a crucial time: when students graduate, they will either further their educations or enter job training. It's imperative that we are able to assess their achievement in such basic and important areas as reading and mathematics.

Today I will be focusing my remarks on reading as my fellow Board member, Kathi King, has focused her comments on mathematics. There is some positive news about reading achievement. The national average reading score for 12th graders in 2009 was higher than in 2005. What's more, 38 percent of 12th graders performed at or above the *Proficient* level, a higher percentage than in 2005.

However, if we go back almost 20 years and compare today's national reading results to the average reading scores in 1992, these scores are not quite what they should be. The data also show there have been no significant changes in the racial/ethnic and gender achievement gaps since 1992. Additionally, the percentage of students performing at or above *Basic* in 2009

was not significantly different from 2005, and was lower than in 1992.

I'm afraid the news is also mixed for my home state. We are very proud of one remarkable result: We have the highest scale score—275—in reading among African-American students in the whole report, although this score is not significantly different from some other states. Essentially, our African-American students scored comparably with their West Virginia White peers—in fact there was no achievement gap between those two subgroups in reading. We are encouraged to see African-American students performing at high levels as my state has focused its efforts at the school, district, and state levels to improve the achievement of all students, particularly minority and impoverished children. At the same time, our state ranked the lowest of the 11 states in terms of average reading and math scores, so we still have more work to do.

When I saw the results of the 12th grade report, I recalled West Virginia's last NAEP Reading Report Card for fourth and eighth graders, which showed that over almost two decades, there had been only slight gains in reading comprehension and no sustained trend of improvement. So what is happening?

First, I believe reading comprehension is a skill that is developed not just in English class but in other subjects, and especially in activities outside the classroom. There are some interesting NAEP data that support this.

Nationally, there is a 25-point gap between the scores of students who read five or fewer pages for school daily and the scores of those who read 20 or more pages for school daily (either for class work or for homework). Across the 11 pilot states, West Virginia had the highest percentage (45 percent) of students reading five pages or less per day, and these students had an average NAEP score of 268. In comparison, Massachusetts had the lowest percentage (25 percent) of students reading fewer pages, and these students had an average NAEP score of 278. So it seems student habits can influence their level of achievement.

Additionally, there is an overall lack of educators and policymakers pushing our students toward challenging curriculum to better prepare them for life after school. As you may know, CCSSO and the National Governors Association have been deeply involved in the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which aims to create a rigorous set of standards for curriculum and assessment nationwide. When we were assembling research, we found the difficulty and complexity of school textbooks in many subjects has trended downward for several decades.

Like NAEP, the Common Core standards would require students to integrate and analyze what they read—not just pick out discrete facts—and support their judgments with evidence and examples. We need to have this attention to reading comprehension from kindergarten through 12th grade. The earlier we come together collectively—and I'm including teachers, students, parents, policymakers, and education experts—to create a challenging reading curriculum that will give our children a strong foundation of skills, the better prepared they will be in the years ahead.

When West Virginia was devising Global21, we saw the writing on the wall. We're becoming a more global and competitive economy by the minute, and our young adults have to be prepared. It's urgent because we're hearing from too many colleges that remediation rates are

high and from too many employers that future workers won't be armed with the skills they are looking for in employees.

I hope the scores we have seen today provide a call to action for what we need to do to improve achievement at this critical grade. I also hope more states become involved in this 12th grade NAEP because we sorely need this gold standard as a check on how well students are doing at this level. Our 12th graders are standing on the cusp of a new beginning. They need to be prepared for what lies ahead—and we need to be prepared to trace their progress. Thank you.