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**STATEMENT ON THE NATION'S REPORT CARD:
*NAEP 2009 Mathematics Trial Urban District Assessment***

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The results of this year's Trial Urban District Assessment are sobering in light of an economy that has impacted Americans of all education and income levels. As Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has emphasized, for a time when we need to be as competitive as ever, in education we are far behind where we need to be.

But there is also good news in today's results. Based on results in Washington, DC, we are learning more about what is possible in education reform. After decades of intelligent and hard work in our urban school systems, many presumed that most urban districts were so far behind that they were beyond help. But when we look at DC students' rate of growth over the past two years, it is absolutely clear that public schools have enormous power when they are backed by the collective will, work, and the expectation to succeed.

I am going to brag for a minute about the results that our students, teachers, school leaders and other staff have achieved over the past two years—not only because they deserve it, but also because they are fighting a long-standing prejudice against students in urban districts, and they are starting to win. If school districts across the nation seize the moment these results provide, subsequent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams can show much higher national results.

In the results comparing DC to other states released earlier this year, 8th grade growth in DC since 2007 was nearly three times the national average, and our 4th-graders were the only group in the country to see gains in all these subgroups: African-American students, Hispanic students, and students on free and reduced lunch.

Compared to other school districts, the average mathematics score for the District of Columbia Public Schools increased by 6 points since 2007 at grade 4, more than any other TUDA district. The district's score increased by 7 points in 8th-grade math, based on the results that included all the schools under our control. Our 4th-grade growth from 2007 to 2009 was twice as high as the second-highest grower, Boston, and our 4th-graders are outpacing charter schools for the first time since 2003. The growth over the last two years (2007 – 2009) at grade 4 is higher than it was in the two years before (2005 – 2007), and we have many reasons to believe that this is just the beginning.

I believe that continuing and increasing this progress in DC and across the country will all come down to how much district leaders and superintendents are willing to invest in the most important factor in student achievement in schools: our teachers. Our first two years included the operational improvements that could support schools and teachers more centrally—streamlining and improving the quality of data; making sure teachers all have access to supplies, textbooks, functioning copy machines and other basics that they historically have often done without; awarding merit pay to the highest growing schools; and providing the beginnings of improved professional development.

Going from 8% to 12% proficiency among our 8th-graders is significant, but 12% proficiency in math clearly does not yet indicate a successful school system. Part of the reason for this low number – and for the low math results we are seeing across the country – is that no school district has yet made it clear to teachers what good teaching practice looks like, and then tied that to an assessment system that holds teachers accountable for their effectiveness in moving student achievement.

This year, The New Teacher Project released *The Widget Effect*, a study that sheds light on one of the most significant reasons for the failure of public school systems to prepare students with the skills they need. Nationally, we treat our teachers like widgets, interchangeable parts that are recruited, hired and compensated with little regard for their value as individuals in their students' lives and achievements.

While private organizations excel in part through assessments that measure an employee's effectiveness honestly and professionally, school systems using "satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory" ratings gave 99% of teachers satisfactory ratings despite the results we are seeing in student achievement across the country. In Washington, DC, despite being ranked last in the country on most academic measures, we found that 95% of our teachers were told they were meeting or exceeding expectations under the former assessment system. Many were lucky to receive one performance assessment in a year.

This year, after much collaboration with teachers and research on what other school districts were doing across the country in this area, we implemented a Teaching and Learning Framework that provides clarity about what we believe good teaching looks like. We are linking it to IMPACT, a new assessment system that measures the "value added" of teachers in tested grades, or the growth that each teacher catalyzes with students in a given year.

Under IMPACT, teachers are receiving five observations per year, some of them from master educators with excellent track records for success. Teachers were the ones to provide this innovation when they requested outside observers in addition to their principals, who may or may not be experts in the teachers' subject areas and grade levels.

I believe that to achieve the absolutely possible and necessary results we are asking teachers to produce, leaders across the country will have to find ways to differentiate the steps toward mastery in teaching. In Washington, it has helped enormously to have a system of mayoral governance in which the mayor is accountable for district-wide student achievement, and I am fortunate to have more latitude in making management decisions as the agency head.

Urban school districts need to do a better job of supporting schools from the central office, and this takes good management. The rest will take courage and a collective grit. We are creating something that does not yet exist on a national or even district level, and working to change systems that have benefited adults to the tune of less than 20% proficiency rates among children.

Setting clear expectations, delivering honest performance assessments, and using them to improve practice and hold us all accountable are going to generate some noise. But when we do truly recognize and reward our most effective educators, give guidance for improvement for all teachers, and easily exit those from our school systems who are not up to the job, results on NAEP and every other high quality measurement will dramatically improve in every type of school district and on a national scale. The stakes and implications of this work are tremendous. I would urge all school systems to view even the most sobering of today's results through the lens of what is possible, and to seize this opportunity to move forward to achieve it.