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Thursday, 3/29/07, 10:00 a.m. EDT

Contact: Stephanie Germeraad  
(202) 357-7504

**STATEMENT ON PUERTO RICO RESULTS FROM  
THE NATION'S REPORT CARD: MATHEMATICS 2003 AND 2005**

**LUIS A. RAMOS**  
**Member, National Assessment Governing Board**  
**Community Relations Manager, PPL Susquehanna, Berwick, Penn.**

We are here today to share news from the 2003 and 2005 Nation's Report Card for mathematics. I consider it a privilege to return to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, a place I dearly love and the place where I was born.

I am a member of the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent group created by Congress in 1988 to oversee and set policy for NAEP. Our 26 members represent a wide variety of experiences – state governors, local and state policymakers, educators, researchers, business representatives, parents and the general public. We come from big cities and small towns all across the U.S., but the one thing we all have in common is our desire to help educators make good decisions about schools by providing accurate, reliable data about what students know and can do.

The objective of NAEP is the same in Puerto Rico as it is anywhere else in the United States: to provide a snapshot of how well students are doing, and to offer a clear perspective on academic performance that can help inform efforts to raise achievement. While students may be required to take other tests on an annual basis, NAEP provides the only way to evaluate and compare academic achievement over time and between different groups of students throughout the U.S.

It is important to keep in mind that the results we are talking about today represent a starting point to which we can compare future scores in order to measure growth in achievement over time. It is also important to highlight the significance of these reports, which mark the first time ever that a NAEP exam has been administered in an entire jurisdiction in a language other than English. I encourage educators throughout the island to closely examine today's results and look for areas of both strength and weakness. Improvement cannot be realized until educators know more about the subject areas where students are doing well, and where they are struggling.

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Math skills are essential for the future success of our children, allowing them to obtain good-paying jobs, which in turn allow them to maintain a good quality of life and contribute positively to society. So the challenge for Puerto Rican educators is to continue to work hard to improve student achievement in an environment that is very different from that of the United States mainland.

The comparison to mainland U.S. scores may seem unfair at first, but there is much to be learned from benchmarking against the performance of others and then looking for best practices. Comparisons are often made between states that serve very different student populations with the goal of learning from each other so everyone can improve. We know that there are differences between the children in Patillas and San Juan, between rural barrios and urban cities, between disadvantaged children and their wealthier counterparts, and so on. Improving the education of all children is the ultimate goal.

As we just heard, in both years, results for fourth- and eighth-graders in Puerto Rico were below the U.S. average in math. But it's important to note that all of public school students in Puerto Rico in grades 4 and 8 met the federal definition of low income in 2003, compared with just 44 percent of fourth-graders and 36 percent of eighth-graders on the mainland. Still, students in Puerto Rico scored significantly lower than those low-income counterparts throughout the U.S.

While the results suggest that there is considerable room for improvement, they also provide a good understanding of where student performance in Puerto Rico is strongest, and what areas may need extra attention. Geometry was an area of relative strength for students in Puerto Rico. However, that portion of the test only accounted for 15 percent of all fourth-grade test questions in 2005, and 20 percent of all eighth- grade items.

In talking with Puerto Rico education experts I have learned that, for the most part, local assessments are multiple-choice type exams. This complicates matters, since NAEP requires students to respond to multiple choice items as well as questions requiring them to show their work and explain their answers – skills for which many Puerto Rican children may not be prepared.

The results may be lower than we would like them to be, but they offer a starting point for characterizing and evaluating the achievement of Puerto Rican students in the future. Results from The Nation's Report Card, while sobering, hopefully provide another tool that can be used to direct focus where it is needed most.

These reports reveal some major challenges for the institution of Puerto Rican education. The results indicate that more of our island children must work at developing the foundation in math so that they will be ready to participate in high school and beyond. Maintaining an edge in today's technology-focused world requires higher-level math skills, and one of the biggest demands facing schools is how to best prepare every child in Puerto Rico with an education that will position them for success. It's important to do a good job of educating children from all backgrounds and under all circumstances. Their future depends on it.