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**STATEMENT ON RESULTS FROM
THE NATION'S REPORT CARD: U.S. HISTORY 2006 AND CIVICS 2006**

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I am last on today's agenda and last to speak about the results of the 2006 NAEP U.S. History assessment. Elementary teachers, as you know, spend a majority of their day teaching reading and math. Is there time in the day for social studies, of which history should be the most important part? After all, No Child Left Behind has left it out.

Should social studies be last in the day, or should there be time for this subject? Are we doing well enough in U.S. history that it should continue to be left out of the No Child Left Behind legislation?

The Nation's Report Card on U.S. History gives us some encouraging news, but it also shows troubling deficiencies in how much our students have learned about American history and what they are able to do with it.

We've heard that average achievement in U.S. history has improved at all three grade levels assessed in NAEP, including the 12th grade. That's a notable improvement because it's the first time NAEP has reported gains at 12th grade in any subject since 1998 when reading moved up a little— though it fell back again in 2002.

The NAEP results indicate, and there is other evidence too, that history is making a comeback after decades of retreat in the school curriculum. But clearly, there is still much more to do before we can be satisfied.

NAEP gives us three ways of looking at our situation: scale scores, achievement levels, and sample questions. I am particularly interested in the questions since I serve on the Board

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committee that approved them, and as a teacher, I see quite directly how they relate to what we are trying to accomplish in class.

One important part of history is chronology—how events unfolded over time. Unfortunately, when children are asked about the chronology of events in the past, their performance often is substandard. For example, one of NAEP’s multiple-choice questions asked students to identify the first permanent English settlement in North America. The assessment was given in early 2006, long before Queen Elizabeth visited Jamestown, Virginia last week. But it is still disappointing to me, as a fourth-grade teacher, that only 34 percent of fourth graders answered that question correctly. The percent correct jumps to 71 percent for 8th graders across the United States, but that means 29 percent didn’t know the answer, and chose St. Augustine, Santa Fe, or New Amsterdam instead.

Students should also be able to draw from resources in order to apply their knowledge and skills about U.S. history. Fourth and eighth graders had to use skills in graph and chart reading in answering two questions about U.S. military spending patterns between 1935 and 1941. Seventy percent of fourth graders and 91 percent of eighth graders could accurately choose the years—1940 to 1941—in which military spending went up most sharply.

But when asked what event caused this change—which requires knowledge of history as well as skill in reading charts—only 38 percent of fourth graders chose the Second World War. Among eighth graders only 53 percent correctly identified World War II. Of the other options given, 20 percent of eighth graders chose the First World War and 19 percent picked the Vietnam War—both more than 20 years away from 1940-1941.

On NAEP students must be able to produce and write answers for constructed-response questions as well as to select them in questions that are multiple-choice. And it is here that the most serious difficulties arise.

Eighth and twelfth graders were shown a photograph of the Berlin Wall being torn down in 1989. It was labeled “Berlin, 1989.” The students were asked what event was depicted in the photo and what influence the event had on American foreign policy.

More than half of 8th graders and almost one-third of 12th graders did not even give a partially correct answer that the photo showed the fall of the Berlin wall—despite the strong clue. Only one percent of eighth graders and 12 percent of twelfth graders gave an appropriate or complete response that identified the event and mentioned the impact of the end of the Cold War. One completely inappropriate response said the photo showed the beginning of the Holocaust.

Historical facts do not speak for themselves. Primary sources and reliable secondary sources must be compared and interpreted in an organized structure. In grade 12 there are a number of assessment questions that require not merely recall, but explanation as well. In one constructed response question, students were asked to identify and explain a significant factor that led to U.S. involvement in the Korean War. Only 14 percent provided an appropriate response by mentioning the containment of communism or the fear of communist expansion.

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To summarize the status of student performance, NAEP has a series of achievement levels—Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. These offer judgmental standards of what students should know and be able to do. Like all standards they are subject to criticism as too hard or too easy. But these standards were carefully set. They are based mainly on the judgments of experienced classroom teachers and other educators who serve on panels that make recommendations to the Governing Board.

Last year 70 percent of students in fourth grade nationwide could reach at least the Basic achievement level, which means they could identify and describe a few of the most familiar people, places, and events in American history, and could express in writing a few ideas about familiar historical themes. This was up from 64 percent at or above Basic in 1994 and 66 percent reaching that level in 2001.

But the proportion at or above Proficient, which requires some application and analysis of the knowledge students have, was just 18 percent.

At 8th and 12th grades the NAEP standards reflect the curriculum and expectations for those grades, but the story told by the achievement levels is the same. The situation is particularly worrisome at grade 12 where about half of the students taking the test were age 18 and old enough to vote. Even with the recent gains, only 13 percent of these high school seniors could reach the Proficient achievement level, which requires reasoned interpretations and the use of historical evidence to support their views—not simply assertion and emotion.

And just 47 percent of 12th graders reached the Basic achievement level, which denotes only partial mastery of significant historical knowledge and analytical skills. In 2001, the last time NAEP assessed U.S. history, only 43 percent of seniors were at or above Basic. The gain is encouraging, but the figure is still disappointingly low.

It is important to keep the integrity of history as a separate subject. History should be approached with hands-on, minds-on. Educators who teach history at any grade level benefit from professional development endeavors. The efforts of professional development programs, such as the federal Teaching American History grants, are critical to continued improvement.

History tells a story. The place where we are meeting today reminds us of the importance of history. In the 18th century the Old State House was the site of momentous events that led to the American Revolution. Now in the 21st century the building has been restored as a museum of the history of Boston, a city that continues to shape the nation in which we live. For the United States to flourish our people need the knowledge of themselves that can come only from the study of history.

History shouldn't be "left behind" in our schools or in the efforts to improve them.

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