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**STATEMENT ON RESULTS FROM  
*THE NATION'S REPORT CARD™: MATHEMATICS & READING 2007  
TRIAL URBAN DISTRICT ASSESSMENT (TUDA)***

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Chairman, National Assessment Governing Board**

We are pleased to present the performance Report Card for the 11 urban districts that have agreed to be part of a trial district-level assessment. The nation is indebted to the teachers and administrators in these districts who are willing to share their results with the public and to the Council of Great City Schools for its support of this assessment effort. We understand that there is always some risk in subjecting oneself to critical review. Our thanks to the educators in the 11 districts for accepting that risk. The data are important and add to our understanding of student performance.

In reviewing today's reports, you will note considerable similarity between the results and recently released state and national reading and mathematics results. As we found in the main assessment, performance tends to be stronger in 4<sup>th</sup>-grade than in 8<sup>th</sup>-grade and somewhat better in mathematics than reading. Large and troubling achievement disparities between racial and ethnic groups continue to be a challenge. As in the case of state-to-state comparisons, student achievement differences between the participating urban districts are noticeable, but improvements in most situations in the scores of the lower-performing students are apparent. It would appear that programs designed to help students who are below average in reading and mathematics achievement are having a positive effect. Several districts have made considerable progress since the last Report Card and they should be favorably recognized by their communities.

Two years ago, after reviewing the urban district results, I suggested that urban education appears to be a condition of residence, rather than a reason for poor performance. Today's results reinforce that suggestion. While the districts participating in this assessment are not a representative sample of all urban school districts, they do represent some of the size, geographic and demographic characteristics that are found in urban settings across the country. Compared to

national averages these districts have a higher portion of students classified as poor and minority, yet in some cases the academic performance of their students is above the national average for like students.

While there is considerable variation in student scores and gains between the districts, setting aside race and ethnicity, it is not evident that the student performance differences in these districts are a function of size, location, poverty level or education expenditures. Minorities in the participating districts score less well than White students, but this is similarly true in districts of all sizes and locations. However, differences between student groups in the urban districts tend to be similar to those shown in the national and state results. Further analyses might show that the spread of disaggregated achievement results across large urban districts may not be fundamentally different than the spread across school districts in general after demographics are considered.

Consequently, the obvious question for educators, the public and policymakers arises; if one urban district can foster above-average performance among student subgroups, why do other similar districts fail? What accounts for the inter-district differences in today's results? If it is not inner-city conditions, levels of poverty or levels of investment, what is it?

Our country's challenge to educate all children is not lessened by today's results, but using urban conditions as a principal reason for achievement disparities may be more fanciful than real. The question is what really causes differences in performance.

We would like to answer this question. Obviously, answers to questions of cause are very important in setting educational policy and selecting instructional strategies. However, The Nation's Report Card assessment process is designed to describe student performance, not to explain why performance is strong or weak. Consequently, we must leave to others the analytical tasks of sorting out the organizational, instructional, family and/or community support differences that cause wide performance variations. We make a point of this issue out of hope that today's findings and the questions noted will help build the demand for serious research into why students in some districts outperform similar students in other districts.

For those of us who report to the public on the status of school performance, the lesson from the results of the trial urban assessment is clear. It is important to look beyond the overall averages to comparisons of results for like groups of students. Some urban districts may have lower scores on the average because they have more students from groups that historically score less well, but actually may be producing as good or better results than non-urban districts with smaller low-income and minority student groups. Today's results raise that possibility.