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**STATEMENT ON THE NATION'S REPORT CARD:
*NAEP 2011 Mathematics and Reading: Trial Urban District Assessment***

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Thank you. I am Michael Casserly, Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools. I am pleased to join this distinguished panel this morning.

Before I begin, I want to thank Tonya Miles, Cornelia Orr, and their team at the National Assessment Governing Board; John Easton and his staff at the Institute of Education Sciences; and Jack Buckley, Peggy Carr, and their team at the National Center for Education Statistics.

It is an honor to work with you on this important project. Thank you for the great job you do. I also want to take a second to summarize why we initiated the Trial Urban District Assessment over 10 years ago.

1. We—as urban school systems—wanted to make it crystal clear that we were fully committed to the highest academic standards for our children.
2. We wanted to be able to compare ourselves individually and collectively with each other and the nation.
3. Finally, we wanted a common way to gauge our progress and evaluate our reforms in ways that the current 50 state assessment system does not allow.

I am repeating these reasons today because people often forget how serious we are about improving student achievement in our urban public schools.

I want to call your attention this morning to the large city variable and to the progress that individual cities have made since 2003 when the first reading and math results were available.

First, the data show that reading achievement among fourth and eighth grade students in the large cities has climbed steadily since 2003.

In fact, the percent of large city students scoring at the proficient level or better in reading has increased by 26 percent among fourth graders and 21 percent among eighth graders since 2003—gains that substantially outpace the nation in both grades.

And the percent of urban fourth graders scoring at or above proficient in math has increased by 50 percent and the number of eighth graders at this level has increased by 63 percent between 2003 and 2011.

Moreover, the percent of fourth graders in the large cities scoring below basic levels in reading dropped by 15 percent between 2003 and 2011, and the number of eighth graders below basic dropped 17 percent.

Even more impressive, the percent of fourth graders in the large cities below basic levels of attainment in math dropped 30 percent over the same period and the percent of eighth graders below basic declined 26 percent. In other words, we are increasing the percent of our students doing well and decreasing the numbers doing poorly.

Second, the data are clear that we are closing the gap with the nation. Between 2003 and 2011, the difference between the large cities and the nation in fourth grade reading has declined from 12 scale-score points to 9 points. And the difference between us and the nation in eighth grade reading has shrunk from 13 points to 9.

Put another way, the reading gap between the large cities and the nation has narrowed by 25 to 30 percent over the last eight years.

In math, the difference between us and the nation at the fourth grade level has shrunk from 10 points to 7 points between 2003 and 2011. And at the eighth grade, the gap has narrowed from 14 points to 9.

In this case, the math gap between the large cities and the nation has shrunk between 33 percent and 36 percent in those eight years.

It is clear that the nation's urban public schools are not only improving, but we are catching up.

Third, most individual cities have seen reading and math gains over the last eight years that are at least nominally greater than those made by the nation.

You can see on these graphs that not only have the large cities in the aggregate (red) posted reading gains that are significantly larger than the nation (green), but that most individual cities have seen significant improvements since 2003 and gains that are nominally larger than the country as a whole.

The fourth-grade reading gains in Atlanta, DC, and Boston were particularly notable over the period, as were the eighth grade reading scores in Atlanta, Houston, and Los Angeles.

The same is true in math. The large cities have outpaced the nation and most individual cities have shown gains that are nominally larger than the nation. Fourth grade math gains were particularly notable in Boston, DC, San Diego, Atlanta, Chicago, and Houston; and eighth grade gains were significant in Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Houston.

In fact, the fourth and eighth grade reading and eighth grade math gains in Atlanta were the largest or tied with the largest gains seen in any jurisdiction—state or local—between 2003 and 2011 as were the eighth grade math gains in Boston.

The large cities, of course, also made statistically significant gains in eighth grade reading and fourth and eighth grade math between 2009 and 2011, a period that was marked by substantial budget cuts and growing poverty rates among our students.

In other words, the progress is evident in both the long term and the short run.

Finally, since the last release in 2009, our organization has finished an important new study on why some of our urban school districts have shown greater gains than others; where the nation's urban schools show the greatest academic strengths and weaknesses; who has the best results after adjusting for various background variables; which cities posted the largest gains among African Americans, poor students, and English learners; how alignment affected the NAEP gains; and what reforms undergirded the progress of these cities.

The results tell us a lot about how and where we need to improve as we implement the new common core standards that the nation's urban schools also aggressively support.

Urban schools in general are getting better. But we are determined to make them better still. We are not satisfied but we believe that we are on the right track—and the new NAEP data bolster our confidence.

With each passing administration, NAEP is giving us the tools we need to continue improving our instructional practices and give all our urban students a shot at the American dream.

And that's the point behind all the numbers. It is why we volunteered in the first place. It is why we pursue the reforms we are pursuing. It is why we are so devoted to the research.

We want to know what is working and what isn't, for we are not interested in reflecting or perpetuating the inequities under which too many of our children suffer. Our job is to overcome them, so poverty and race and language never define our students' chances for a brighter future. And NAEP is helping us do that.