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STATEMENT ON THE NATION'S REPORT CARD
*Mega-States: An Analysis of Student Performance in the Five
Most Heavily Populated States in the Nation*

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Moving to Florida from another state has offered me a unique perspective on the remarkable progress realized in the Sunshine State since the 1990s. As Indiana's education chief, I urged data-driven reform, advocated universal accountability, and made difficult decisions in an effort to move the state ahead and provide high-quality education to children. Throughout those years, our team turned to the state we considered the national leader in education reform—Florida—to gather ideas and examine best practices we could use to help Indiana. Florida had been doing the hard work and it was paying off.

How did we know? We had only to look at the sure, steady progress evident with each National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report card. That progress is apparent in the first NAEP report focused on the five most populous states.

Florida has made some of the greatest score gains in both mathematics and reading since the 1990s compared with the other "mega-states."

Our fourth graders rose 16 points on NAEP reading from 1992 to 2011 while the nation rose 5 points. Florida's improvement was highest of the mega-states. In grade 8, our 8-point jump was also the highest of the mega-states.

Fourth-grade mathematics increased 26 points from 1992 to 2011, while the nation rose 22 points. Florida's 23-point increase in eighth-grade mathematics was above the national average, second to Texas and tied with Illinois and New York.

In 2011, 30 percent of Florida's grade 4 Hispanic students scored at or above *Proficient* on NAEP reading, the highest of the mega-states. Hispanic fourth graders had a higher percentage (23) at or above *Proficient* on NAEP science than the other mega-states.

All of this progress has taken place in a state that is defined by its cultural and socio-economic diversity. Our schools serve the third-largest population of English language learners in the

nation. We have the highest percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price school lunches of the five mega-states.

What learning gains over the past two decades show Florida educators may also be valuable for other states—both large and small.

They show that high expectations are important, and that students who have demonstrated improvement in middle and elementary school are ready to succeed in rigorous mathematics, science, and reading courses in high school.

They demonstrate that Florida's teachers and principals are doing an increasingly better job of educating our children, particularly those student populations that have been underserved in the past.

And they confirm there is still work to do, particularly when you consider achievement gaps evident in this data set. Florida must be data-driven as we work to support teachers in developing the next set of solutions.

For this educational transplant, the NAEP report also confirms what our team in Indiana knew instinctively—Florida was doing the hard work that leads to student success and leading the way in implementing education reform.

Florida's educational progress over the past decade coincides with raising standards, establishing higher achievement levels, and adopting policies such as third-grade reading retention and A-F school grades. While there may not be a strict causal relationship between those actions and Florida's steady improvement, we cannot ignore that prospect.