



**Embargoed: Hold for Release Until  
Thursday, February 21, 2013, at 9 a.m. (PST)**

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

**RICHARD ZEIGER**  
**Chief Deputy Superintendent, California Department of Education**

California has a long track record of using assessments as one method of measuring student achievement. We have been part of the national NAEP since its inception in 1971, and have participated in state NAEP since it began in 1990.

We have also taken part in the Trial Urban District Assessments (TUDA) since they began, with three districts currently volunteering to participate: Los Angeles, San Diego, and Fresno unified school districts.

We consider NAEP to be an important tool for measuring achievement. Like all tools, it has its limitations—among them that NAEP is not aligned to the standards that guide instruction in our state.

Nevertheless, because NAEP gives us a common yardstick to measure performance among states, it is appropriate to use these results to focus particular attention on what today's report calls the "mega-states."

Collectively, we are where the students are. And by virtue of our size and our challenges, it is no exaggeration to say that our success as a nation depends upon the success of California and the other mega-states.

I would not presume to speak for any other state, but I can certainly say that despite the steady achievement gains we have made in California, we're not yet where we want to be.

And while I commend the authors of today's report for their efforts, much of what it contains comes as no surprise. We're all too aware from California's statistics that:

- Half our children rely on federal assistance to have a healthy meal each day.

- One in four comes to school needing to learn English.
- One in five comes from a home where no adult holds a high-school diploma.

Combine that with a sustained disinvestment in public education, made all the more severe by the Great Recession. We invest little more than half per student what New York does, and as a result have only about half as many teachers per student as they do.

Given those realities, what's noteworthy is that California's achievement levels are as similar as they are to the other states in the study.

It is critical to place the report's findings in context. Figure 1 on page 4 shows the huge demographic shifts that have taken place over the study period, particularly in California and in Texas.

In California, the key shift has been the increase in the population of English language learners (ELL). We have the highest proportion of English language learner students in the nation, and among the states in this report, we actually test a higher proportion of them than do the other states. Figure 2 shows, for example, that 32 percent of our grade 4 NAEP sample in 2011 were English language learners.

The impact of English language learners on performance comparisons is clearly exhibited in Figure R3 on page 11. When disaggregated by ELL status, the data show no significant difference for ELL students among all five mega-states and the nation in the percentage at or above the *Proficient* level in NAEP reading.

We are looking forward to more thoroughly analyzing these results, as well as those of future NAEP assessments.

And we hope that today's report will encourage national policymakers to focus greater attention on steps that will help California—and its fellow mega-states—make real and sustained progress.