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Statement from the National Assessment Governing Board in Response to the National Superintendents Roundtable Report Released January 17, 2018

For 25 years, national and state leaders have relied on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as a stable and reliable marker of student learning and progress. Later this spring, for example, NAEP will release reading and mathematics scores that include results for the nation, states, and 27 large urban school districts that volunteer to take NAEP. Tennessee and other states, and many urban school districts, are demonstrating that student achievement can improve as documented by NAEP results.

NAEP cannot be used to evaluate individual students, teachers, or schools, but it is invaluable to document the progress or lack of progress made by our nation's schools over time. Good progress was made in 4th grade mathematics between 2000 and 2015, as the percent Proficient increased from 24 percent to 40 percent. On the other hand, we haven't seen the same change in reading.

While the National Assessment Governing Board will continue to clarify misperceptions about the meaning of NAEP achievement levels, the Board has always been clear that Proficient does not mean "on grade level." Instead, Proficient sets a standard that reflects competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills. Expecting less would be a disservice to American students.

The most recent comprehensive evaluation of the NAEP achievement levels by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, released in late 2016, specifically recommends that the NAEP achievement levels not be changed.

The achievement levels help the public understand NAEP results. Proficient on the Grade 12 NAEP reading assessment, for example, is about equivalent to what high school seniors need to achieve to be placed in non-remedial college-level courses.

It's important to know that the achievement levels are approved by the 26 members of the Governing Board, who represent a cross-section of the American public with an emphasis on education. These decisions are based on the recommendations of standard-setting panels, which include a majority of teachers and other educators.

We welcome opportunities to clarify NAEP achievement levels, but believe that this report's suggestion to change the names of the levels would obscure important information about student achievement in the United States.