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Council of the Great City Schools
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. ♦ Suite 702 ♦ Washington, D.C. ♦ 20004
<http://www.cgcs.org>

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CONTACT: Henry Duvall
(202) 393-2427

City Public Schools Make Significant Gains in Math on NAEP

Progress in Reading More Modest

WASHINGTON, Dec. 1 – Big-city school districts that volunteered to be tested on the rigorous National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) made significant gains in mathematics on the 2005 results released today, especially in the fourth grade, but more modest increases in reading.

Math Scores

The *Nation's Report Card* shows eight out of 10 city school districts making a statistically significant jump in average scores since 2003 in fourth-grade math.

These same cities posted fourth-grade math gains that outpaced national increases and their respective state gains: Atlanta (five points), Boston (nine points), Cleveland (five points), District of Columbia (six points), Houston (six points), Los Angeles (four points), New York City (five points), and San Diego (six points).

Two urban school districts – Austin, Tex., and Charlotte -- have average scores in fourth-grade math above the national average. And four districts -- Boston, Houston, New York City and San Diego – have scores now approaching the national average.

The participating Chicago and Charlotte school systems made modest gains in fourth-grade math, which were higher scores than 2003, but not large enough to be statistically significant by NAEP rules.

In eighth-grade mathematics, four of 10 city school systems made significant progress in the Trial Urban District Assessment, a special project in NAEP to assess the academic performance of urban school districts that want to measure their reform efforts to higher standards.

Since 2002, 11 big-city school districts have volunteered, with Austin stepping up to the national test for the first time this year.

Eighth graders in Boston, Houston, Los Angeles and San Diego made significant progress on the NAEP in math. Austin and Charlotte outpaced the national average, while Boston, Houston, New York City and San Diego are approaching it.

Also making modest gains in eighth-grade math were Atlanta, Charlotte, Chicago, the District of Columbia and New York City, while Cleveland's average score dipped.

“We are very encouraged by the math scores in these big city school districts that volunteered to measure themselves on the nation’s toughest test,” says Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a Washington-based coalition representing the nation’s largest urban public school systems.

“The upward trend in math scores demonstrates that urban public schools are stepping up to the plate to improve performance in this critical area,” he emphasizes.

Reading Scores

In addition to mathematics, the 11 cities taking the 2005 NAEP also were assessed in fourth- and eighth-grade reading as well. The participating districts saw progress in this area, but the gains did not appear to be as strong as those in math.

Results of the fourth-grade reading scores showed an upward tilt on the 2005 trial urban NAEP, released by the National Assessment Governing Board and administered by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics.

Since 2002, Atlanta and New York City registered significant gains in fourth-grade reading, but there was only modest improvement in Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Cleveland, Houston and Los Angeles over the past two to three years. And test scores were flat in the District of Columbia and San Diego.

Seven cities, moreover, have posted fourth grade reading gains that outpaced national increases and their respective state gains: Atlanta (six points), Charlotte (two points), Chicago (five points), Cleveland (two points), Houston (five points), Los Angeles (five points), and New York City (seven points).

In eighth grade, reading scores were generally flat in the big cities compared to a slight downward slide in public schools nationwide. Los Angeles, however, registered significant gains in NAEP eighth grade reading scores since 2003, while Atlanta made significant gains since 2002. Boston, Chicago, Houston and San Diego saw slight gains since 2003.

“We are pleased to see some of our cities making significant gains in reading but we need to see significant progress in all of them,” says Casserly. “We are conducting research now on why we are seeing faster gains in some cities than in others.”

Math Proficiency Levels

Six out of 10 big-city school districts have made statistically significant gains in the percentage of students scoring at or above proficient since 2003 in fourth-grade math. Boston, the District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City and San Diego saw the substantial increases.

Austin and Charlotte have a higher percentage of students scoring at or above proficient than the nation, 40 percent and 44 percent, respectively, compared with 35 percent of the nation.

Major progress could also be seen among the cities decreasing the percentage of students who were performing below basic in fourth-grade math between 2003 and 2005. A significant drop was found in eight of the 10 cities – Atlanta, Boston, Cleveland, the District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City and San Diego.

In eighth-grade math, four of 10 urban school districts made significant gains in the percentage of students scoring at or above proficient. The four cities -- Boston, Houston, Los

Angeles and San Diego -- also saw a significant reduction in the percentage of students below basic. Austin and Charlotte students outperformed students nationally.

Reading Proficiency Levels

Los Angeles is the only big-city district to have posted significant improvements in students scoring at or above proficient in fourth-grade reading in 2005. The other nine cities, excluding Austin since this is its first year taking NAEP, registered slight increases or no jump at all.

Charlotte is the only district that has a higher percentage of eighth-grade students who score at or above proficient than the nation, with 33 percent compared with 30 percent, respectively.

Generally, eighth-grade reading proficiency was flat in the cities and the nation.

Scores by Race/Ethnic Group

The 2005 trial urban NAEP also reports data by race/ethnicity, poverty, English-language proficiency and gender. When comparing test scores by race/ethnicity, the 2005 NAEP found that students in some cities outperformed their counterparts of the same race nationwide. For example, in fourth-grade reading:

- White fourth graders with reading scores above the national white average: Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Charlotte, D.C., Houston and Los Angeles.
- African American fourth graders with reading scores above the national African American average: Austin, Boston, Charlotte, Houston and New York.
- Hispanic fourth graders with reading scores at or above the national Hispanic average: Austin, Charlotte, Chicago, Cleveland, Houston and New York City.

The Council of the Great City Schools initiated the Trial Urban District Assessment in 2000, when it approached the National Assessment Governing Board with the idea.

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