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Big-City Schools Show Academic Improvement, Outpacing the Nation's Gains in Math, 4th-Grade Reading on National Test

Progress Particularly Strong for African-American and Poor Students

WASHINGTON, Nov. 15 – Students in big-city public schools have made faster math and reading gains than the nation on the rigorous National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) over the last several years, according to new data released today.

The Nation's Report Card for 2007 marks the first time that the nation will see four- to five-year trends on NAEP for the country's major urban public school systems since the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) was launched in reading in 2002 and math in 2003.

Math Gains in 4th and 8th Grades

The new NAEP data show that fourth and eighth graders in large central city schools have made statistically significant increases in math since 2003 and demonstrate that the pace of change in big cities has been faster than nationwide gains by varying margins in each grade.

For example, the percentage of big-city fourth graders scoring at or above basic levels of achievement jumped from 63 to 70 percent between 2003 and 2007; the percent scoring at or above proficient levels increased from 20 to 28 percent; and the percentage scoring at the advanced level went from 2 to 4 percent—gains that equaled or exceeded nationwide increases in each case. Conversely, the percentage of urban fourth graders scoring *below* basic levels in math decreased from 37 to 30 percent between 2003 and 2007—a faster drop than seen nationally.

Math scores among fourth graders improved significantly in eight of 10 TUDA districts participating since 2003—Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, the District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, and San Diego.

The new report also shows that the percentage of urban eighth graders scoring at or above basic achievement levels in math increased from 50 to 57 percent; the percentage scoring at or above proficient increased from 16 to 22 percent; and the

percentage scoring at the advanced level increased from 3 to 5 percent—again, gains that exceeded nationwide improvements in each case. Conversely, the percentage of urban eighth graders scoring *below* basic levels of attainment dropped from 50 to 43 percent.

Math scores among eighth graders in Atlanta, Boston, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, the District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles, and San Diego—or eight of 10 TUDA districts participating since 2003—showed significant gains.

Reading Improvements in 4th Grade

The new NAEP report also shows significant improvements in the reading performance of urban fourth graders since 2002. The data show that the percentage of urban fourth graders reading at or above basic achievement levels jumped from 44 to 53 percent since 2002; the percent reading at or above proficient levels increased from 17 percent to 22 percent; and the percentage reading at the advanced level went from 3 to 5 percent—gains that outpace national improvements in each instance. Conversely, the percentage of urban students reading *below* basic levels of performance decreased from 56 percent in 2002 to 47 percent in 2007—a faster drop than that seen nationwide.

Reading scores among fourth graders in Atlanta, Chicago, the District of Columbia, and New York City showed significant gains from their first year in TUDA.

Eighth-grade reading remained steady in large central city schools overall since 2002, although scores in Atlanta, Cleveland, and Los Angeles increased over the testing period. NAEP performance nationwide among eighth graders decreased.

“We are very encouraged that urban public schools are advancing in reading and mathematics 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.

Minority and Poor Students Improve

Finally, the new NAEP data reveal significant academic progress among African-American and poor students in the big cities. The percentage of African-American fourth graders in large central city public schools scoring at or above basic in reading, for instance, increased from 33 percent in 2002 to 41 percent in 2007. The percent of African-American fourth graders scoring at or above basic in math jumped from 47 percent in 2003 to 58 percent in 2007. Eighth grade African-American students posted similar math gains.

Large central city school students who were eligible for the National School Lunch program also improved their reading and math scores.

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**Comparison of Large Central City (LCC) Reading and Math Trends with Nation
(Baseline Year to 2007)**

Percent At or Above Proficient

Grade 4	Reading			Math		
	2002	2007	Δ	2003	2007	Δ
LCC	17	22	+5	20	28	+8
Nation	30	32	+2	31	39	+8
Gap	13	10		11	11	
Grade 8	Reading			Math		
	2002	2007	Δ	2003	2007	Δ
LCC	20	20	0	16	22	+6
Nation	31	29	-2	27	31	+4
Gap	11	9		11	9	

Percent At or Above Basic

Grade 4	Reading			Math		
	2002	2007	Δ	2003	2007	Δ
LCC	44	53	+9	63	70	+7
Nation	62	66	+4	76	81	+5
Gap	18	13		13	11	
Grade 8	Reading			Math		
	2002	2007	Δ	2003	2007	Δ
LCC	60	60	0	50	57	+7
Nation	74	73	-1	67	70	+3
Gap	14	13		17	13	

Percent At Advanced

Grade 4	Reading			Math		
	2002	2007	Δ	2003	2007	Δ
LCC	3	5	+2	2	4	+2
Nation	6	7	+1	4	5	+1
Gap	3	2		2	1	
Grade 8	Reading			Math		
	2002	2007	Δ	2003	2007	Δ
LCC	1	1	0	3	5	+2
Nation	2	2	0	5	7	+2
Gap	1	1		2	2	