

**Remarks by Michael Casserly, Executive Director  
Council of the Great City Schools  
At  
Press Conference on Urban NAEP 2007 Writing Results  
April 3, 2008**

Thank you. I am Michael Casserly, Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools. I am pleased to join this distinguished panel this morning.

Before I begin, I want to thank Darv Winick, Charles Smith, and their team at the National Assessment Governing Board; Russ Whitehurst and his staff at the Institute of Education Sciences; and Mark Schneider, Peggy Carr, and their team at the National Center for Education Statistics.

It is an honor to work with you on this important project. You have done an excellent job. Thank you.

I also want to take a second to summarize why we initiated this trial urban district assessment back in November of 2000.

1. We—as urban school systems—wanted to make it crystal clear that we were fully committed to the highest academic standards for our children.
2. We wanted to be able to compare ourselves with those facing many of the same challenges.
3. Finally, we wanted a way to gauge our progress and evaluate our reforms in ways that the current 50-state assessment system does not allow.

I am repeating these reasons today because people often forget how serious we are about improving student achievement in our urban schools.

I also want to call your attention to the Large Central City variable in the report being released today and make a number of quick points.

First, there is a limited amount of data on the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) in this report. We were tested in only the eighth grade and our trend lines extend only to 2002—although this is not a problem since we made as much progress in the last five years as the nation made in ten.

Second, we were pleased and encouraged by our progress since the last testing, but not satisfied. The large central cities increased by six scale score points between 2002 and 2007, twice the rate of gain made by the nation at large.

The individual cities on which there are trend lines also showed substantial progress. Atlanta posted an eye-popping 15-point gain, compared with Georgia's six-point increase. Chicago went up by 10 points. Houston increased by 5 points (a

statistically insignificant margin) but Texas dropped by one. And Los Angeles jumped by nine points, while California remained stagnant.

Third, it appears that the large central cities are closer to the national average in writing than we are in reading or in math—although we are behind in all three subjects. It was encouraging, however, to see eighth-grade gains in a literacy-related subject when we have had a hard time getting traction at that grade level.

Fourth, our gender gaps mirror the national patterns almost exactly, but we have made nice progress in reducing our racially identifiable achievement gaps since 2002.

The black-white gap nationally narrowed by three points since the last testing, but the gap in the large central cities shrank by six points.

The Hispanic-white gap nationally decreased by three points, but the gap in the cities narrowed by five.

And the gap between poor and non-poor students in the cities fell by six points.

What was particularly encouraging was that our poor students, our African American students, and our Hispanic students all made gains faster than their same-group peers nationwide.

African American eighth-graders in the cities were up eight points.

Hispanic eighth-graders in the cities were up seven points.

And free and reduced price lunch-eligible eighth-graders were up eight points.

Finally, these data are giving us the tools we need to ask hard questions about our instructional practices. We are now analyzing the demographic patterns behind our scores; conducting case studies of the instructional practices of the TUDA districts; and examining differences between NAEP frameworks and state standards to see how the gaps affect our gains.

And that's the point behind all the numbers. It is why we volunteered in the first place. So we could tell what was working and what wasn't. So we could raise the quality of public education in our Great Cities. So we could give our kids—the kids that America too often overlooks—a shot at the American dream.

We know that we have a long way to go. But, the status quo in urban public education has ended. And it is being replaced by progress.

Thank you.