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Council of the Great City Schools

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FOR RELEASE

October 24, 2022

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Students in Most Urban Districts Hold Steady in Reading on National Test

*The Nation's Report Card Shows Score Changes for Large City School Districts
Mirror National Trends in Math*

WASHINGTON, Oct. 24 – The 2022 Nation's Report Card for the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) shows most participating districts held steady in fourth- and eighth-grade reading and mirrored national trends in math.

Fourth-grade reading scores in 65 percent of participating districts remained unchanged from 2019, compared to 42 percent of states and territories taking the test.

Similarly, 85 percent of TUDA districts held steady or improved their scores in eighth-grade reading from 2019 to 2022, compared to 37 percent of states and territories.

In mathematics, most participating urban districts saw significant declines, mirroring the pattern seen nationally in the wake of the global pandemic.

In general, large city schools lost ground on the nation in only one of four subject/grade combinations (fourth grade math) while two of four areas (fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math) showed performance that mirrored the nation. National public-school scores declined significantly in eighth-grade reading from 2019 to 2022, while large city schools performance held steady.

“Declines on NAEP scores because of the pandemic are a *national phenomenon*, not just a large city phenomenon,” said Ray Hart, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools. “The pandemic took a heavy toll on our schools and communities, but the reading results from our TUDA districts indicate that the investments and the support from teachers, staff, parents, and the community are bearing fruit.”

The Council and its member districts have been working to address the unfinished learning that the pandemic caused over the last three years. In June 2021, the Council released a guide on investing American Rescue Plan funds strategically and effectively. Every week, the Council hosts virtual meetings for superintendents, school board members, chief academic officers,

bilingual directors, special education directors, and others to strategize on how to accelerate learning. Additionally, the Council released a handbook on how to keep students on grade level while addressing unfinished learning. The Council disseminated tips for how to modify district curriculum, provide professional development, and monitor progress.

Our Great City School districts have developed a portfolio of strategies to mitigate the impact the pandemic has had on student achievement, including intensive grade-level classroom instruction, high-dosage tutoring, targeted summer school programming, other extended learning time opportunities to address unfinished learning and provide mental health support.

Examples include Dallas Independent School District, which is using ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funds to create Reading Academies designed to implement professional development on the science of teaching reading for kindergarten to third grade teachers and administrators. The district is also using ESSER funds to provide high-quality tutoring to help students accelerate learning. The funds were used to purchase software, secure curriculum, and hire tutors.

Tennessee's Memphis-Shelby County Schools is using federal funding to provide technology and tutoring sessions to children before, during, and after the school day. Funds are also being used to hire specialized education assistants in the classroom to support teachers and help keep students engaged.

New York City, the nation's largest school district, is using federal pandemic relief funds to pay for a variety of academic supports, including expanding its free pre-K program and buying devices for remote learning.

And Miami-Dade County Public Schools is using ESSER funds to provide students with K-12 interventionists and tutors, expansion of afterschool enrichment programs, reading and math coaches for Tier 1 schools for two years, and extended summer school programming.

Early results from state and interim testing since NAEP was given in January through March of this year indicate that classroom, tutoring, and summer-school strategies are starting to alleviate the effects of COVID-19 on student performance. Still, these efforts will take time.

“We improved faster than the nation in reading and math, fourth and eighth grades between 2003 and 2019, and we studied what it took to make those gains,” said Hart. “We have made up lost ground before; we will do it again. With a continued focus on addressing unfinished learning through high quality classroom instruction and just-in-time support, districts can ensure that all students remain on track to graduate college and career ready.”

Despite the immense challenges that urban schools faced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the nation's large urban schools are determined and committed to improving the achievement of all our students. The skill and hard work of teachers, staff, parents, and communities over the next several years will recreate the trajectory of improvement across big cities seen before the pandemic.

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