

**Remarks by Michael Casserly, Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools
At
Press Conference to Release Urban NAEP 2007 Results
November 15, 2007**

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 with 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 want to call your attention to the Large Central City variable in the reports being released today and make a number of quick points about the overall progress of urban schools—instead of focusing on the gains or losses of any individual district. I also want to call your attention to our trends since we first began this project, rather than to the year-over-year trends, for these 2007 results present the first real look at how urban schools *writ large* have done over about the last five years.

First, the headway students in large central city schools have made in math and fourth grade reading since we started NAEP testing is significant and generally faster than the nation.

This progress is evident however one looks at the data. We have made progress since 2002 when we first started taking the reading tests. We have made progress since 2003 when we first started taking the math tests.

We have also made progress since 2005. We have made progress on scale scores. We have made progress on achievement levels.

We have made progress on the number of students scoring at or above basic. We have made progress on the number of students scoring at or above proficiency. And we have made progress on the number of students scoring at advanced levels.

We have also made progress in decreasing the number of urban students scoring below basic levels of attainment.

We have made progress on our percentile scores. And we have made progress among our African American and poor students.

Finally, we have made progress with our lowest performing districts, as the range in scores between our highest and our lowest achieving cities has narrowed while our averages have increased.

Our gains are statistically significant and educationally significant. Maybe politically significant as well.

If you look at our individual cities, however, you will see a messier picture from one testing cycle to another. You will see arrows going up, down, and sideways. But if you stand back from the individual trees, you will see a forest that is growing taller and getting stronger.

Urban schools, in fact, are getting better. And we are determined to make them better still. We know that we need to accelerate. We know that our gaps are still too wide. And we know that we didn't make much progress with English language learners.

But these NAEP data give us the tools we need to ask hard questions about our instructional practices. We have launched a project to analyze the demographic patterns behind our scores; conduct case studies of the instructional practices of the TUDA districts to understand how they affect NAEP scores; and examine differences between NAEP frameworks and state standards to see how the gaps affect our gains.

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 ways to go. But, the status quo in urban public education has ended. And it is being replaced by progress.

Thank you.