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***Tough Budget Decisions for National Assessment of Educational Progress
Statement of National Assessment Governing Board Chair David Driscoll,
Former Commissioner of Education in Massachusetts***

Education agencies and students are still feeling the effects of the economic situation in the United States and around the globe. It does not seem likely that a substantial turnaround in the fiscal situation for schools and school programs will occur in the near future. As with other U.S. education programs, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as The Nation's Report Card, is not exempt from these challenges.

For the past 18 to 24 months, the National Assessment Governing Board, which I chair, has been discussing how best to deal with the fiscal constraints facing NAEP. Before this year, we and our partners at the National Center for Education Statistics had made adjustments to the NAEP schedule and operations without making significant and obvious cutbacks to the program. Essentially, we've been making some tweaks, but small changes are no longer possible.

The fiscal 2013 federal budget reduction resulted in a \$6.8 million cut in funds for NAEP.

To adjust to this budget cut, after considering a number of alternatives, the Governing Board decided to postpone the 2014 administration of U.S. history, civics and geography assessments at grades 4 and 12; however, the grade 8 assessments will remain as scheduled. A previous decision to stop new development of test questions for U.S. history, civics and geography was made with the intention that doing so would provide sufficient savings, but that was not the case. The 2013 budget cut required immediate action, and cutting a significant part of the NAEP schedule was necessary to reach the \$6.8 million reduction.

In making decisions about NAEP, the Governing Board recognizes the importance of assessing the range of subjects taught in U.S. schools. Stepping back from this principle was an extremely difficult decision for us. The Governing Board also recognizes the importance of science and technology for sustaining and increasing the nation's global competitiveness. Therefore, the NAEP schedule reflects a commitment to assessing these subjects and moving ahead with computer-based assessments; in fact, the NAEP writing assessment has become completely computer-based.

The 2014 NAEP Technology and Engineering Literacy (TEL) assessment is another example of NAEP's evolution to computer-based assessments. However, the TEL assessment will be implemented for another more important reason: assessing the competitiveness of U.S. students in a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)-focused world. The TEL assessment, along with the existing NAEP science and mathematics assessments, will help the nation know if we are making progress in the areas of STEM education.

In addition, for more than 10 years, the Governing Board has been studying the potential for using NAEP as an indicator of academic preparedness in reading and mathematics for college and job training. This effort is well-positioned to inform policymakers and the public about the status and progress of high school seniors' "college and career readiness"—both nationwide and in the states voluntarily participating in the grade 12 NAEP.

The five-year budget outlook suggests that the Governing Board will need to make changes that will reduce NAEP's ability to report student progress in a number of areas. We would like to avoid eliminating subjects or target populations such as students living in large urban districts, but we will not be able to meet fiscal targets without some fundamental changes to the NAEP program. Our goal is to make cutbacks that do the least harm to NAEP's mission of providing nationally representative, valid and reliable test results on the academic progress of American students across several grade levels and content areas. Small, unnoticeable cuts will not provide the savings needed over the next five years.

Future decisions of the Governing Board will address the constrained fiscal budget for NAEP with due care and public deliberation. These decisions will not be easy for the Governing Board, as we balance the public's need for trusted information about student achievement with the realities of reduced resources. However, the Governing Board is committed to making these decisions and providing their rationales in an open and transparent manner.

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The National Assessment Governing Board is an independent, bipartisan board whose members include governors, state legislators, local and state school officials, educators, business representatives, and members of the general public. Congress created the 26-member Governing Board in 1988 to set policy for NAEP.