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**STATEMENT ON THE NATION'S REPORT CARD:
*NAEP 2010 Geography – Grades 4, 8, and 12***

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As a geography educator and a veteran of all three NAEP geography assessments, it is an honor to have this opportunity to help focus attention on an increasingly important school subject. I want to highlight some key results from the 2010 NAEP geography report card and put them into context by asking why they might have occurred and what they might mean for K-12 geography education in the future.

The overall pattern of student performance in this report shows improvements at grade 4, no change at grade 8, and a slight decline at grade 12. This pattern reflects the status of geography in America's schools. Geography is taught as part of social studies in grades K-4 and that curricular arrangement often extends into grades 5 and 6. Geography typically appears in grades 7 or 8 as a stand-alone course with a "world cultures" label. In high school, geography is rarely taught as a stand-alone course and, at best, it is infused with another subject. The only exception is the rapid growth of Advanced Placement Human Geography with more than 68,000 AP test takers in 2010, a 35 percent increase compared to 2009.

Despite the relative lack of attention to geography in America's schools, the 2010 NAEP Geography Report Card contains some encouraging news. First, the significant increase in performance by students in grade 4 is important because these students represent the next generation moving through U.S. schools. They will progress into higher grades with a stronger grounding in geography. Second, the increase in scores for the lowest-performing students at all three grades means that the gap between the lowest and highest performing students is narrowing. Third, another gap is narrowing. It is especially pleasing to see the significant narrowing of the gap in average performance between Black and White students at grades 4 and 8. These two narrowing gaps remind us that geography is accessible and important to all students, and both groups should have the foundations they need to be informed and productive citizens.

The report, however, also contains some discouraging news. First, average performance at both grades 8 and 12 did not improve over average performance reported in either 1994 or 2001. In fact, at grade 12, there was a decrease from 1994. Second, the gap persists between the performance of boys and girls. For all three NAEP Geography reports, boys have out-performed girls in terms of average scores by grade and in terms of percentage at or above the *Proficient* level by grade. While this gap is real, it is important not to overstate the difference. Although the difference in average scores between boys and girls is statistically significant, it is small: the two distributions overlap to a large measure. Boys and girls are equally capable of mastering and enjoying geography.

In summary, therefore, we see a picture of positive change, no change, and even slight decline across the grades. What might be responsible for this mixture of results?

First, given the current commitments of curriculum time, the NAEP Geography results meet the expectations—if not the hopes—of geography educators. To the extent, however, that classroom time becomes an even more precious and scarce commodity, geography, with subjects such as history and the arts, is losing out in the zero-sum game that results from high-stakes testing. In 1994, an influential report about time allocation in the curriculum had the provocative title of *Prisoners of Time*. Sadly, geography is in danger of becoming a casualty of time.

Second, many of the drivers of change are not unique to the United States. In many countries we see a similar shift in educational priorities leading to the reallocation of time resources, and a comparable emphasis on high-stakes testing. We can also see similar patterns of results, as in the gap in performance between boys and girls.

Given the NAEP Geography 2010 results and current educational priorities in the United States, what are the implications for geography education that will take place before the next NAEP Geography in 2014?

Time in the classroom is allocated on the basis of a subject's perceived importance to the education of the next generation of students. In the case of geography, the rationale for importance has centered on the idea of a literate high school graduate who is able to meet the demands of citizenship. While geography begins with place location knowledge, the focus on understanding relationships between people and their environment is increasingly crucial in a world in which the local is connected to the global, and global events affect local places. Geography is all about understanding the connections between people, places and environments. As the economic and cultural forces of globalization and the impacts of global environmental change are felt by everybody everywhere, the case for geography seems both obvious and inescapable.

And yet geography's role in the curriculum is limited and, at best, static. That is ironic given the convincing case that can be made for the importance of geographic literacy. But it is doubly ironic given a world in which adults and now children have smart phones and tablets that can

download maps on the fly, provide directions to places, and give your location to your friends. We are entering a world in which GPS, the global positioning system, is changing our ability to know about the locations of ourselves and others. Online mapping sites such as Google Earth allow students to explore any location in the world as a map or a satellite image and to change the scale of the map or image. Behind many web sites that provide locational information are Geographic Information Systems (GIS) that manipulate geospatial data. Through volunteered geospatial information, students using GIS can help to create maps that are more up-to-date and accurate than those of official mapping agencies. And geospatial data are becoming commonplace in activities ranging from getting travel directions to finding the nearest store.

I hope to see a NAEP report in which there are illustrations of students working with computers, geospatial tools, and geographic thinking skills to solve problems not just in geography but in biology, history, ecology, economics and beyond. Thus, the grade 12 question on population density in Australia and Libya on page 47 of the report, for example, could be reframed using a GIS program. Students could be presented with a map of population density in either country and asked to overlay the map with one of a series of other maps—topography (elevation and drainage), climate, resources—in order to explain the pattern of population density.

The geospatial revolution has radically changed our capacity to analyze, represent and understand our world. It offers powerful tools that have applications not just in geography as a school subject but across the entire curriculum and, equally importantly, in our daily lives beyond school. A high school graduate must be able to think spatially and understand how to use geospatial tools in ways that are appropriate and responsible. Geography is, therefore, increasingly important in understanding our world and in coming to terms with it. Its value goes beyond just fostering informed citizenship: it offers career and lifelong learning skills and it allows us that ultimate existential understanding: Who we are is where we are.

For those reasons, I hope the next NAEP report will demonstrate progress in geographic understanding at all grades, for all students. Thank you.