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

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I am pleased to be part of a panel that discusses the NAEP performance of a subject in the realm of social studies—a content area that, far too often, takes a backseat to reading and mathematics. The results on the NAEP U.S. History assessment that we see today paint a picture of not just the performance of our nation's students, but also why history and other social studies subjects are truly important.

The report shows some significant gains in U.S. history performance, especially among our fourth and eighth graders when you look at those who have scored at or above the *Basic* achievement level since 1994. But look at the performance of our high school seniors: For every NAEP U.S. History assessment since 1994, over half of twelfth graders scored below *Basic*. And for all grade levels since 1994, no more than 20 percent of our students scored at or above the *Proficient* achievement level.

Until very recently, I was the state superintendent of West Virginia schools. But long before that, I taught a variety of social studies subjects at the middle and high school levels, including U.S. history, West Virginia history, American government, civics, and world cultures. From this vantage point, I always saw history as a critically important content area to be studied by our students.

The role of an educator is to make sure students understand the facts and to teach them how to apply those facts in real-life contextual situations, so they can become strong thinkers and problem-solvers. There are a lot of lessons to be learned from where we've been as a nation that students can then apply to contemporary culture so we can move forward. Moreover, being knowledgeable of our nation's heritage helps to ensure that our students don't forget the principles upon which the country was founded. This in turn

will pave the way for them to become civic-minded and productive citizens in this country, and indeed in our world.

Over the years, as I've transitioned from instruction into administration, I've seen how reading skills can be enhanced by the study of history and other social studies. In addition, I think very few students lack an interest in all of the important events and people that shape our history. The task we need to carry out in education is engaging students and stimulating that interest.

As schools chief in West Virginia, I made sure we placed tremendous value on history in our state assessments and standards for social studies. We felt strongly about giving history priority attention. So we tried to push ourselves to think out of the box regarding ways students learn history and other social studies. For example, some of our students have created history-related projects online using graphics and multimedia presentations. We also strengthened our civics education component, including the teaching of patriotism. And we have partnered with the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the country's largest American organization of combat, whose members have provided firsthand accounts to our curriculum developers, teachers, and students to further stoke interest in important historical events.

I believe this kind of engagement needs to start early in the elementary grades so we can build a strong foundation in U.S. history. According to background variable data from the NAEP U.S. History assessment that can be found on the NAEP website, it is reported that nationally, about 45 percent of fourth-graders had teachers who spent more than two hours a week on social studies in their classrooms. I'd like to see a higher percentage on our next history report card.

This is a critically important time where we can put U.S. history in its proper place in academics, and the world stage. Overall, the quality and success of our lives can only be enhanced by a study of our roots. They say history repeats itself and I believe it. But it may be even more accurate to say if you don't know your past, you won't have a future.