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**STATEMENT ON *THE NATION'S REPORT CARD:*
*Trends in Academic Progress 2012***

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One of the best things about the National Assessment of Educational Progress long-term trend assessment is that it allows us as a country to get beyond the finger-pointing and the competing claims about whether our schools are in crisis—or not—and answer the question, “How are we doing?,” against a set of benchmarks that have remained essentially unchanged for 40 years. For The Education Trust as an organization, this is an essential tool in our efforts to help both educators and the public understand where we are making progress—and for whom.

What is important to know is that, when you break out the data over the long term and ask who is improving, the answer—as you can see in this first slide—is “everyone.” At the elementary and middle-school levels, all groups of children are performing higher today than they were when this assessment got underway. And the good news, given where they started, is that black and Latino children have racked up some of the biggest gains of all.

And these, by the way, aren’t just minor, statistically significant but meaningless gains.

- In mathematics, for example, African American and Latino 9-year-olds are performing about where their 13-year-old counterparts were in the early '70s;
- Moreover, while it might have seemed impossible 25 years ago for black and Latino 9- and 13-year-olds to reach the proficiency levels that white students then held, they have indeed reached those levels in math.

As a result, even though the performance of white students has improved, too, we’ve made significant reductions in long-standing gaps between groups.

- In reading, gaps are down by 30 to 51 percent;
- In math, they are down by 26 to 42 percent.

Moreover, there’s been progress across the achievement spectrum, from those at the low end of the performance distribution to those at the high end. In mathematics, for example, the lowest-

performing 13-year-olds in 2012 (those at the 10th percentile) scored 27 points higher than did the lowest-performing 13-year-olds in 1978. And the highest performers in 2012 (those at the 90th percentile) scored 16 points above the highest performers at the beginning of the trend.

These results put to rest any notion that our schools are getting worse; in fact, they are getting better for every group of children.

If we have a crisis in American education it is this: that we aren't yet moving fast enough to educate the "minorities" who will soon comprise a "new majority" of our children nearly as well as we educate the old majority. *At best*, students of color are just now performing at the level of white students a generation ago.

It's a fool's errand to make claims about causality, especially when surrounded by statisticians from the National Center for Education Statistics. So I won't do that here. But as we ask the question, "How can we accelerate progress for the very students who will soon be our new majority?" it is instructive to look at rates of progress over time.

It's clear, for example, that some of the biggest gains for black and Latino students took place in the 1970s and early 1980s, a time when policymakers were beginning to confront problems inside of the educational system—including segregation and deep funding inequities—and problems outside of it.

Results since the late 1990s—those that coincide with efforts to raise achievement and close gaps through standards, accountability, and public reporting—show gains as well; but, like the gains in the late 1970s, they also suggest a worrisome slowing down in the most recent years. Take African American 9-year-olds, for example. From 1994 to 1999, math scores actually declined by 1 point, or by about 0.2 points a year. But between 1999 and 2004, just as accountability and public reporting efforts took hold nationwide, scores increased by 13 points, or roughly 2.6 points per year. Since then, however, the rate of improvement has slowed. Between 2008 and 2012, math scores for black 9-year-olds increased by only 2 points, or about 0.5 points annually.

This pattern of steep gains between 1999 and 2004, followed by slower rates of improvement, is consistent across all groups of 9-year-olds. But the trend is not uniform across both subjects and all three ages.

What lessons should we take from all of this? First, improvement and gap-closing is not just a theoretical possibility, it is happening: Long-standing gaps between groups are getting ever smaller, though not nearly fast enough for either the kids or our collective future.

Second, as we seek to pick up the pace and close these gaps once and for all, it behooves us to mine every bit of data we have—including both this assessment and its main NAEP counterpart—in the effort to learn from the times and, in the case of main NAEP, the states, where progress has been greatest.