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

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As the principal of Shawnee Middle School in Shawnee, Okla., I'm encouraged by the progress in so many areas as I review *The Nation's Report Card: Trends in Academic Progress 2012*. This report, which assesses how student achievement over the past 40 years has progressed in the basic subjects of reading and mathematics, gives us a sweeping look at how America's students are doing overall compared with previous generations. Contextual factors are assessed, too, such as how much time students spent reading for fun.

In some ways, the findings are full of hope: Today's children ages 9 and 13 are scoring better overall than students at those ages in the early 1970s. Yet within such promising upward trends are hidden challenges, as I call them.

One of the most striking findings has as much to do with my role on the National Assessment Governing Board as it does with my roles as the principal of Shawnee Middle School, and as an educator in America. I'm referring to a disturbing lack of improvement among 17-year-olds. Since the early 1970s, the average scores of 17-year-olds in both reading and mathematics have remained stagnant.

The data collected for this report include parents' level of education. Since 1978, an increasing number of parents recognize the value of higher levels of education—at least for themselves. Look for example at the 17-year-old students assessed in mathematics: In 1978, 32 percent of the parents of those children graduated from college. Last year, 51 percent of the parents of 17-year-olds graduated from college. The growing emphasis that parents put on education is gratifying to see.

You would think the value put on higher education among parents would translate into better performance for their children. Yet, despite some gains among lower-performers, the average scores of 17-year-olds over 40 years have stayed flat. If parents are achieving more, you'd think that older students in particular would be achieving at higher levels.

At Shawnee Middle School, we all work to get parents involved. Our parent-teacher organization re-established itself this past school year, with encouraging results, but even before this, our

parents stepped up when they needed to support their children. I know that Shawnee parents who engage in educational activities with their families—reading to their children at home; taking them to museums, concerts, and cultural events; participating with them in science activities—have children who do markedly better than other students in school. So why is it that some parents who think enough of education to go to college themselves have children who are not scoring higher? Why isn't that interest in education translating to their children's achievement in school? That is to me one of the most provocative and challenging long-term trends within this report.

Some other particular trends in achievement stand out to me. In reading, boys at age 9 are closing the gap, with average scores increasing from 201 in 1971 to 218 in 2012. In mathematics, the gender gap at age 17 narrowed from 8 points in 1973 to 4 points in 2012 due to a larger increase in the average score for girls than for boys.

This report also reveals that children who more frequently read for fun—that is, outside of class—score higher in reading than students who do so less frequently. I can tell you what I observe at my school that might provide some context with regard to gender and reading. We have an after-school book club with attendance that ranges from 12 to 20 students—but generally there are only 2 or 3 boys. We also have an accelerated reader (AR) program and most of our AR top-performers and prizewinners are girls.

It is also encouraging that the racial/ethnic gap has narrowed for most age groups in both reading and mathematics since the early 1970s. This report shows double-digit gains in average scores of black and Hispanic students at all three ages across the country. The hidden challenge, however: Since the last long-term trend NAEP assessment in 2008, only the white-Hispanic gap among 13-year-olds in reading has narrowed.

Though the national numbers in this report show the percentage of Hispanic 13-year-old students more than tripling since 1978, at Shawnee, the numbers are a bit lower—the number of students in that racial/ethnic group has probably doubled at my school over the decades. And those students, I should add, are the ones whose parents are most involved in their children's education, taking off a day from work, if they have to, to be at school if their child's teacher calls. That may be the case across the country, and may explain some of the narrowing gaps between Hispanic and white children.

In the years since this trend assessment began, several efforts to strengthen our education system have been introduced. There was the "Nation at Risk" report in 1983; there was No Child Left Behind in 2001. If we were to look at this history 10 years from now, we would add Common Core State Standards as a new attempt to increase the rigor of our coursework for all students. The issues and questions persist, with the common thread throughout every effort perhaps being the drive to improve schooling—and measure that improvement. And there has always been progress, side by side with hidden challenges.

The great value of this report is in allowing us to see both the progress and the problems. Our 9- and 13-year-olds are making gains, but that pace isn't as evident among 17-year-olds. The achievement gaps are closing, but still exist. The trend of higher levels of parental education is up—but doesn't always translate to better scores for students. This report gives us answers over the long term, but invites us to keep asking questions about what we did right, what we did wrong, and how we can improve America's education.