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**STATEMENT ON THE NATION'S REPORT CARD**  
*Mega-States: An Analysis of Student Performance in the Five  
Most Heavily Populated States in the Nation*

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When I was chair of the Reporting and Dissemination Committee of the National Assessment Governing Board, my experience as a superintendent of a large California school district brought to mind how useful it would be to isolate important data and trends in several of our biggest states. So I encouraged the Board to work with the National Center for Education Statistics to produce this report. Using our most heavily populated states, which represent about 40 percent of the total public school student population, this report displays shifts not only in scores, but also demographics and other important aspects that allow us to see achievement in an important context. It should be noted that the per-pupil expenditure data are from 2009. My state, California, experienced about a 10 percent cut in K-12 expenditures from 2009 to 2011. Cuts may have occurred in the other states as well.

A major area I find interesting is the rate of accommodations and exclusions on NAEP for students identified as either English language learners (ELL) or students with disabilities (SD). As you see in the report, in each of the five “mega-states”—and in the nation overall—there has been an increase in the percentage of those identified as SD and/or ELL from 1998 to 2011 just when you isolate NAEP reading at the fourth-grade level. However, the state-by-state exclusion rates fluctuate across the board. NAEP is truly our gold standard of measuring student achievement, and as many students as possible should be included. Those who partner to produce NAEP have endeavored to reduce exclusion rates while being respectful of state and local district policies and individualized education programs that govern SD and ELL participation. But we have to realize the impact exclusions have on performance, and we need to take the impact of exclusions into account when comparing student performance from state to state.

While this *Mega-States* report provides very interesting data and trends, it offers more than numbers and facts. It potentially opens the door for states to learn from each other's successes and share ideas to boost achievement not only in the mega-states but throughout the nation.

For example, between 1992 and 2011, black fourth-grade students in California and Florida and fourth-grade Hispanic students in New York made larger gains in reading than their national peers. Between 2003 and 2011, Florida students with disabilities and those eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches made greater gains than their peers in the nation. Black eighth graders in Texas scored 42 points higher in mathematics in 2011 than in 1990, which was a larger gain than in any of the mega-states. Those kinds of long-term gains could indicate that something systematic is going on that's positive. If I were a state or local superintendent, principal, or even a teacher in another state trying to bolster reading or mathematics achievement, I would want to learn about some of the programs or initiatives those states have created for these subjects to see if something similar could perhaps work for my school or district.

Although our *Mega-States* report is an unprecedented one, I think our foray into using state data to achieve a larger goal started with our pilot 12th-grade NAEP assessment in 2009. Eleven states volunteered to have their high school seniors tested in mathematics and reading. That report was instrumental in the Governing Board's ongoing comprehensive program of 12th-grade preparedness research, which so far has produced more than 30 studies to try to determine whether grade 12 NAEP can one day serve as an indicator of academic preparedness for college and job training.

Ensuring that today's students will be prepared for tomorrow's world after high school is a concern shared among educators, policymakers, business leaders, and parents. As our economy and workforce become more global and competitive, our preparedness research is an effort to make NAEP data useful to state leaders in judging success in college and career preparation.

I am not proud as I look at my home state's performance in regard to science. Although state support for K-12 education fell by 20 percent over the past four years, California is still the home of Silicon Valley, the hub of our biggest technological companies. Yet California fourth graders scored lower than the nation and all the other mega-states in science in 2009. What does that bode for our future? As of now, science is not part of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, in which 45 states are participating, so it will be up to individual states to assess student performance in the sciences.

Given the importance of science, I would urge the federal government to consider funding another consortium to develop a Common Core science assessment based on the new Next Generation Science Standards. This is a crucial field of study for our students and our nation's economy, and it will be much more cost-effective for states to work together to develop strong science assessments.