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**STATEMENT ON 2005 TRIAL URBAN DISTRICT ASSESSMENT
RESULTS IN READING AND MATHEMATICS FROM
THE NATION'S REPORT CARD™**

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Sixteen percent of our nation's public school students reside in large central cities throughout America. The enrollments of many of those urban districts consist predominantly of poor and minority children, two groups traditionally underserved by their educational experiences.

TUDA gives us a superb source of unbiased and comparable information about the academic successes and the challenges of a sample of these big cities. Many – including Chicago, the city where I live and work – have been at the national forefront in creating and implementing ambitious reform agendas in an effort to overcome the chronic problems faced each day in many of the most troubled urban school settings.

A first look at these results shows that with one or two notable exceptions, the average scores of the 11 districts in 2005 lie below national averages. Grim as that may be, a much different picture is revealed when comparing the achievement of these students to that of those like them nationally. For example, when we look at the data broken down by race/ethnicity, we find:

(more)

- In about half of the participating districts, these urban Black students scored as well or better than Black students throughout the nation;
- In more than half of the districts, Hispanic students performed better than the average Hispanic student nationwide; and
- With only a few exceptions, White students scored as well or better than their counterparts across the country.

When we look even more closely at the data, we can find at least one example for each subject at each grade where a district's overall score is lower than the national average, but all racial/ethnic groups in that district scored higher than their peers across the U.S. This shows exactly how important it is to disaggregate results by race/ethnicity to better understand and interpret student achievement scores.

It is also encouraging to note that these 11 districts appeared to have made greater improvements between 2003 and 2005 than the nation did as a whole, perhaps reflecting the bold school reform initiatives in many of these urban districts.

Without a doubt, there are some positive highlights in this year's TUDA results, and the gains should be applauded. But there are still too many signs of trouble in our cities' schools. The achievement gaps between Whites and minorities are unacceptably high. Across these 11 districts in reading and math in both grades, on average, the lowest-scoring White students most often do better than the highest-scoring Black students. And, Hispanic students do not fare much better. Of course, there is a great deal of variability among the individual students and district populations, but these data highlight a tremendous challenge. I hope they will keep our country focused on the urgent need to increase learning and raise the academic achievement of our most disadvantaged children.

I would like to end by observing a finding of particular relevance to my work as a school researcher in Chicago. We have been learning more about the significance of freshman year success in determining students' likelihood to graduate from high school. I note the sobering fact that in almost half of these TUDA districts, Black eighth grader students have extremely low math scores. In fact, more than 70 percent of these students in those five districts failed to reach the *Basic* achievement level. These students will have enormous difficulty in making the transition to high school and passing, not to mention doing well, in their freshman courses, especially in math. Urban districts must continue to seek new ways to prepare these students, not just for high school, but for a 21st century, knowledge-based economy.

That task won't be easy, but I commend these districts for participating in TUDA. Their courage gives us a sharper sense of the progress the large cities have made and at the same time provides a concentrated focus on the problems being faced across the nation.