

Suggested Remarks
Presentation of National Assessment of Educational Progress Results
Monday, June 23, 2003, 12:30 p.m., the Mezzanine

[Governor Musgrove will be presented by Secretary of Education Valerie Woodruff, Delaware, at the NAEP luncheon presentation.]

Thank you Valerie.

This is a pleasant task to stand before this group and this banner, this day with news that our states are in fact leading the nation in progress in reading as reported by the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Does that mean that we're doing well enough? The answer is obviously no.

Does that mean that the progress is enough? Again the answer is obviously no.

But when 16 states across this nation make significant progress at the fourth grade level in reading, and when eight of those 16 are SREB states, then we legitimately say that these results show that we are taking a leadership position in educational improvement in the nation.

You will see a bit of a “southern crescent” when you look at the states across the nation outlined in red on this map. Half of those states are in the SREB region. In September, we will have reading results from the National Assessment for 2003.

In September, I’m hopeful that we’ll add some additional SREB states to this southern crescent effect.

Secretary Woodruff, Delaware has given us all something to aim for. The increases in reading scores you saw on both your state test and on the National Assessment this year are very impressive. Not only are they very impressive, they are the largest in the country.

Without getting overly technical, in order for a state to show a statistically significant gain, you must have about a four or five point increase on the NAEP reading scale for this to be a statistically significant increase. We had states such as Arkansas, Texas and West Virginia that had increases of 3 or 4 points in their fourth grade reading scores. You were right on the edge of an increase that would have been ruled statistically significant.

I'm hopeful that when we compare the 2003 scores in September with the 1998 scores, we are going to see several more states that have made significant improvement over this period.

At the eighth grade, the reading results for the nation were not as encouraging as the fourth grade results. But again, of the 10 states that had improvements — statistically significant improvements — 5 of those 10 were SREB states. I'm pleased that 1 of those 5 was Mississippi along with Arkansas, Delaware, Florida and Louisiana.

Our 16-state region is less than a third of the states in the United States. This latest National

Assessment report shows that we have one-half of all states that had significant improvements.

Are we satisfied? No.

Does this show that we can lead the nation in educational progress? I think the answer is yes.

Could we have envisioned being able to say this 50 years ago or 25 years or maybe 10 years ago? The answer is probably no.

As Secretary Woodruff said earlier, I believe this is the kind of news and the kind of day that SREB's leaders envisioned almost two decades ago when they began to push to use the National Assessment to get information for each of our states. The

accounts of those early discussions and debates really show that folks in other parts of the country were puzzled as to why we would want to have the National Assessment information for each of our states. Didn't we know what the results would show?

Well, in these latest reading results from the National Assessment, all should see clearly now why we wanted these results. Will we get good news every time? Probably not.

Did the math results from the 1990s and now the first reading results for the twenty first century show that our states are doing better than others thought we would. The answer is yes. Clearly yes.

Are there some surprises in this information?

Maybe for us and others around the country. I think the answer is again “yes.” Is it surprising that white students here in Texas have higher reading scores than white students in Minnesota? I think it’s surprising to lots of folks around the country and probably to folks in Minnesota and maybe to some Texans.

Is it surprising that the fourth grade white students in South Carolina have the same overall NAEP reading score as the fourth grade white students in North Dakota? Probably surprising to the folks in North Dakota and folks elsewhere in America.

Is it surprising that African American students in North Carolina have higher fourth grade reading

scores than the African American students in New York? Might be surprising in New York and elsewhere around the country.

Is it surprising that the fourth grade reading scores for Hispanic students here in Texas and in Florida are higher than in almost every other state across the country?

All of these statements are true and there are lots more that are true, but it's also true that the gap — the gaps among white, black and Hispanic students in our states and across America — are simply too large. While we celebrate the progress that our states have made on these results, and while we celebrate that the fourth grade reading scores for white, black and Hispanic students are up, and the

fourth grade reading scores for students who receive a free or reduced price lunch are up, we know that the gaps are still too large and we are committed to standards and to extra help that will reduce those gaps and eliminate them.

As you've heard, we're going to be getting more NAEP information this year than ever before. So be looking for the information you'll be receiving from SREB about the national assessment results and be looking for the news stories in your newspapers. I trust we are going to have more opportunities to stand before more banners that say that our states are "leading the nation in educational progress" year after year.