Opening Remarks

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Statement by

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On the Release of the PIRLS 2001 International Results

Today IEA is releasing the results for the 2001 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, also known as PIRLS. Conducted in 35 countries at the 4th grade level, PIRLS is the first in IEA's newly developed five-year cycle of reading assessments, and is intended to serve as the baseline for the future assessments planned for 2006, 2011, and beyond.

Those of you who have participated in earlier releases of reports from IEA such as TIMSS, will be aware of the impact of those results in both the United States and internationally. The release of the PIRLS data dealing with reading performance at a critical stage in the development of reading - the transition from learning to read to reading to learn - is expected to have no less of an impact internationally. With data collected from parents about their involvement in their child's reading development, this project breaks new ground in the conduct of assessments of this type.

While today's release will focus on international comparisons among participating countries, those countries will now have the opportunity to examine their results and those factors which help explain reading performance in both the international and local context. It is these analyses that provide powerful insights for policy development and reform. Examples of some of the information that is available for policy development will be described shortly. Data on gender differences within and among countries, for example, is likely to be of significant interest.

Just as IEA's previous studies have proved to be powerful catalysts for subsequent investigations, we expect that the interest generated by the current set of results will provide the impetus for further research. It also will help lay the foundation for planning the next stage of assessing trends in reading achievement, PIRLS 2006, which will commence later in September this year.

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The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement is an independent, non-profit, international cooperative of research centers representing the interests of some 59 member countries and as such relies heavily on the cooperation and collaboration of researchers, students, teachers and governments for the successful completion of what are immensely complex and ambitious projects.

The US National Center for Education Statistics and the World Bank provided critical financial support during the last four years, without which this project would not have been possible. I would like to express our thanks to those organizations for their support as well as to the participating countries who also contributed financially. We believe that the extensive data that has been collected on educational policies, practices, and performance will yield significant returns to funders, researchers, and policy makers alike.

In a few moments the co-Directors of the TIMSS and PIRLS International Study Center in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College will provide a brief overview of some of the most interesting findings from the study. In addition they will provide some insights into the richness of the data in terms of helping to understand the performance differences among countries.

PIRLS is a significant achievement in large scale assessment of student achievement in the area of reading. It builds on the experience and skills that have been developed here at Boston College and brings to bear state of the art applications in assessing reading comprehension, scaling, analysis, and reporting. A very dedicated and talented staff at Boston College has coordinated the efforts of expert methodologists from Statistics Canada, Educational Testing Service in the US, the IEA Data Processing Center in Hamburg, Germany, the IEA Secretariat in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, as well as specialists and consultants from around the world to ensure the successful completion of this project. Similarly, the efforts of individuals in research centers around the world have been critical to the projects success. Finally, the success of PIRLS could not have been achieved without the cooperation of the thousands of principals, teachers, parents and students who gave of their time to participate in this study.

I would like to express my thanks to all those involved in ensuring the success of this project. In particular, I would like to thank the Co-Directors of this project, Drs. Ina Mullis and Michael Martin, for their leadership and commitment to ensuring the successful completion of another significant IEA project.

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