Opening Remarks

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Statement by Dr. Hans Wagemaker

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On the Release of the TIMSS 2003 International Results

Today IEA is releasing the results for the 2003 Trends in Mathematics and Science Study also known as TIMSS 2003. Conducted in 49 countries, 48 at the 8th grade level and 26 at the 4th grade level, TIMSS 2003 offers a state-of-the-art assessment of student achievement in mathematics and science at the fourth and eighth grades.

Building on the success of TIMSS 1995 and TIMSS 1999, this TIMSS assessment cycle offers participants in the earlier studies the opportunity to study trends in eighth-grade mathematics and science achievement at three points in time over an eight-year period. This is a world-first in studies of this kind. While countries that participated in the eighth-grade assessment since 1995 will be able to study trends from 1995 and 1999 to 2003, countries participating at the fourth grade will have trend data from 1995.

IEA's focus on years of schooling–what students should know and can do at a given grade level–sets it at the forefront of international studies of student achievement. TIMSS is designed to provide valuable information to improve school learning in mathematics and science. In addition to providing information about trends in performance over time, this focus on educational improvement demands gathering extensive background information to address concerns about the quantity, quality, and content of instruction. This information can provide powerful insights for policy review and implementation.

Earlier releases of reports from IEA such as TIMSS, have had a significant impact in both the United States and internationally. The release of these data is expected to have no less an impact.

As with previous releases, today's release will focus on the international comparisons among participating countries. Those countries will now have the opportunity to examine their results, and those contextual factors related to schooling, curriculum, and instruction that help explain mathematics and science performance in both the

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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 for those countries that have participated in repeated assessments will be of particular interest given their ability to observe changes in performance over the last 8 years and the potential to assess the impacts of any reforms that may have been introduced during that time.

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 the next round of investigation in the trend analysis of mathematics and science achievement. TIMSS 2007 will commence in February 2005.

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement is an independent, non-profit, international cooperative of research centers representing the interests of some 61 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.

Furthermore, without the support of major funding organizations, including the US National Science Foundation, the US National Center for Education Statistics, the World Bank, and the UNDP which have provided critical financial support during the last 4 years, 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 funding partners, 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.

TIMSS is a significant achievement in large-scale assessment of student performance in the areas of Mathematics and Science. It builds on the experience and skills that have been developed over the many years here at Boston College and brings to bear state-of-the-art applications in scaling, analysis and reporting. A very dedicated and able staff at Boston College has coordinated the efforts of expert methodologists from Statistics Canada, the Educational Testing Service in the US, the IEA Data Processing Center in Hamburg, Germany, the IEA Secretariat in Amsterdam, the Netherlands and specialist 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 project's success. Finally, the success of TIMSS 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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