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**National Urban Alliance Congratulates Eden Prairie Schools
On Test Score Gains and Progress Toward Closing Achievement Gaps**

Equitable learning environments and gifted strategies help accelerate growth

SYOSSET, NY – August 23, 2011 – With the new school year about to start, the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education (NUA) congratulates the Eden Prairie School system and Superintendent Melissa Krull for the long-term improvement of all students, and particularly for students from low-income families and students of color.

By confronting changing demographics with student-focused responses, Eden Prairie is showing the nation how to help teachers identify students' learning needs, build on student strengths, and carry out strategies that help *all* students succeed. Eden Prairie's willingness to move beyond old practices and policies to meet the needs of new and changing students has proven critical to accelerating growth and narrowing achievement gaps across grades and student groups.

The NUA has been honored to be a partner with Eden Prairie in this progress. Drawing from research-proven strategies, the NUA and Eden Prairie educators designed and implemented professional training and small-group workshops to help teachers coach and mentor students from all backgrounds and address diverse academic challenges.

Promising preliminary data suggest that the next round of state test scores will confirm that Eden Prairie continues to be on the right track. Between 2008 and 2010, the results from the district's reading scores on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments were both steady and significant. Black students posted a 14 percent gain in proficiency over this period. That rate is 12 percent for Hispanics; 11 percent for Limited English Proficient students; 9 percent for special education students; and 18 percent for students who qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

"These gains are inspiring and demonstrate that it is possible to close achievement gaps," said Eric Cooper, NUA's president and founder, who will give a speech to Eden Prairie staff on August 29 to start the school year. "We know that some students rely more than others on schools to provide the support and mentoring they need to succeed, and Eden Prairie is meeting those needs. We are excited that all students in the district are achieving at unprecedented levels – not only on tests but in developing higher order thinking skills."

The NUA began working with Eden Prairie in 2006 and has led districtwide professional development efforts that include demonstrating lesson plans, leadership training and summer institutes.

“It’s great to be able to celebrate rising test scores for all of our students, but we are just as proud of how we got here,” Superintendent Krull said. “We didn’t focus on remediation and drill-and-kill strategies that turn off students and teachers. One of the many things that NUA has helped us do is identify strategies that work for students in gifted programs and apply those approaches to create equitable learning environments for all students.”

Eden Prairie also uses performance data in ways that often are ignored by most schools and districts. Through NUA-led professional development, Eden Prairie helped change how teachers think about performance data. Rather than draw on data to reinforce student weaknesses and encourage extra remediation, Eden Prairie teachers use data to identify where students are strong and what motivates them. They then build on those themes through classroom instruction and activities to build on strengths while also addressing areas of weakness.

“Using data in this way is also very common for students in gifted and talented programs, where innovative and personalized instruction and projects are the norm,” said Cooper. “Eden Prairie stands out for its commitment to bringing these approaches to all of its students. I’m confident that more progress lies ahead this school year.”

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Based in Syosset, NY and founded in 1989 at Teachers College, Columbia University, the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education provides student-focused professional development, advocacy and organizational guidance to expand and accelerate student achievement. NUA works with teachers, school administrators and communities to identify strengths to leverage the needs and break down barriers to achievement and transform schools.