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Learning First Alliance Issues Statement about Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Results

Washington, D.C. – December 3, 2013 – The Learning First Alliance (LFA), a partnership of leading education organizations representing more than 10 million parents, educators and policymakers, releases the following statement:

Today, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released the latest results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a test of reading literacy, mathematics, and science given every three years to fifteen-year-olds in the United States and approximately seventy countries and economies worldwide.

It is vital that parents, educators, policymakers and other education stakeholders view these results in context. While the ranking of the United States is disappointing and reflects little change in how our nation's students are performing relative to their peers around the world, this ranking is only one indicator of student achievement. Other measures show significant improvement in the performance of U.S. schools in recent years. The U.S. estimated on-time graduation rate has improved dramatically since 2000 – the first year of PISA. In addition, on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), U.S. 4th and 8th graders made significant gains in math scores between 1995 and 2011.

We would also like to remind stakeholders that there is valuable information in the PISA report beyond the rankings that we should not ignore, including the results of OECD research on the policies and practices that high-performing nations use in their successful efforts to improve student achievement.

From this work, the United States can draw many lessons that can inform our efforts to advance student learning.

According to the OECD, the highest-performing countries combine quality with equity, including by investing in early childhood education and prioritizing links with parents and communities, particularly in disadvantaged schools. In addition, in 2011 the OECD issued "[Strong Performances and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States](#)," which referred to a number of policies and practices that higher-performing nations consistently demonstrate, including that they:

- Commit to education and the belief that competencies can be learned and therefore all children can achieve, evidenced in part by teacher compensation relative to other professions, the value placed on education credentials, and investment in instructional services
- Commit to develop a highly skilled workforce, often subsidizing tuition for initial preparation, establishing a common, high standard for entry into the profession and investing in professional learning to support teachers and school leaders
- View accountability as an important endeavor, often emphasizing "professional accountability" (systems in which teachers feel accountable to fellow teachers and school leaders) as opposed to sole reliance on "administrative accountability" (systems in which administrators use student-achievement test data to reward and punish teachers, schools and districts)
- Invest resources where they can make the most difference – for example, by devoting equal if not more resources to schools facing socioeconomic challenges (the United States is one of very few OECD countries that **does not** currently do this)
- Ensure coherence of policies and practices, aligning policies across the system over a sustained period of time and securing consistency of implementation – for example, announcing a policy only when accompanied by a plan for building the capacity to implement it

There is one notable way in which the United States has moved in the direction of high-performing nations. Such nations typically have established ambitious, focused and coherent standards that are shared across the system and aligned with other components of the education system. Across the U.S., states have taken action to raise performance standards – the adoption by 45 states and the District of Columbia of the Common Core State Standards is a case in point.

To meet the potential of the Common Core and other efforts to implement college and career ready standards, teachers, administrators, parents and communities must continue to work together to align the standards with curriculum, instruction and assessment. This work will take time; however, it is necessary to ensure the standards have a sustained impact on learning outcomes.

In addition, LFA members are committed to working across all sectors of the community to focus U.S. policy and resources on other changes that evidence suggests will result in the advancement of student learning. We will continue to strive for improved student performance, both so that our nation's international ranking will improve and, more importantly, so that our nation's children will have the opportunity for successful lives in the global community.

About The Learning First Alliance

The Learning First Alliance is a partnership of leading education associations with more than 10 million members dedicated to improving student learning in America's public schools. Alliance members supporting this statement include: the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, American Association of School Administrators, American Federation of Teachers, American School Counselor Association, International Society for Technology in Education, Learning Forward (formerly National Staff Development Council), National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Education Association, National School Public Relations Association, National PTA, National School Boards Association and Phi Delta Kappa International. The Alliance maintains www.learningfirst.org, a website that features what's working in public schools and districts across the country.

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