

National Assessment Governing Board

Strategic Visioning Interviews

Summary

May 2, 2024

Background

During this final year of the current Strategic Vision planning for a new strategic vision began. As part of this process each board member had the opportunity to contribute their thoughts during individual interviews to gain deeper input into the new plan. As of this summary, a total of 15 interviews have been conducted. Board members were asked to respond to four questions based on board discussions at its March meeting:

1. What issue/issues in the education sector do you think are most important to recognize as context for the Board's work over the next five years which may have implications for NAEP and NAGB?
2. The current vision is organized by three pillars (inform, engage and innovate). Using the attached documents for reference, are there particular ideas mentioned in each pillar that you think help illuminate the challenge and opportunity in that pillar?
3. Are there other ideas that you would like to introduce to the conversation on any of the pillars? We are especially interested in your thoughts on these questions in regard to the "innovate" pillar.
4. NAEP has long been regarded as a "gold standard" of assessment, based on its high technical quality and representation of the best thinking of assessment and content specialists, state education staff and educators from around the nation. (This taken from language on the DODEA website). From your vantage point, is NAEP still a gold standard? If so, what elements lead you to that conclusion? If not, why not? What does the Governing Board need to do to regain and/or maintain NAEP as the gold standard?

Summary

There is broad consensus that the Strategic Vision is valuable and significant, and the three pillars still hold. Each board member offered important thoughts for priorities in the Strategic Vision that would further advance the usefulness of this document.

One board member commented that they review the Strategic Vision prior to each meeting as a refresher:

"I go back and look at it before we go to every meeting just so that I can keep it in the forefront of my head."

Context

There were many observations about how much the context of education has changed since even SV2025 was written, and these changes have a bearing on the continuing value of NAEP:

- post-COVID learning loss and chronic absenteeism (students and school personnel),
- budget cuts,
- increased politicization of education,
- fragmentation of the school population because of increased mobility to alternative educational settings,
- opposition to assessment,
- advances in AI.

Pillars

A recurring question was: “Is NAEP measuring what matters, or measuring the ‘old things’ based on obsolete curriculum frameworks out of step with what students need to know and be able to do to be successful?”

The use of NAEP frameworks and data for state-level standard setting and curriculum benchmarking is viewed as an important function for NAEP. Examples were shared of states using NAEP for this purpose and promoting this use and making it easier to do is recommended. Some states have used NAEP comparisons with other states to set their improvement goals.

There is strong interest in increasing the usefulness of NAEP, not just at a policy level, but also for educators and parents. There is general interest to understand how NAEP scores can be tied to contextual variables to provide actionable information helping schools tackling increases in chronic absenteeism and youth mental health. Given the importance of socio-emotional learning (SEL), are there ways to integrate SEL into NAEP, as well as other soft skills?

The importance of use cases was stressed. There is a common use of NAEP data for policy making, but those practices could be encouraged with additional cases to illustrate a broad range of applications.

To be more useful results need to be reported more quickly to be actionable for school and legislative calendars. There is the need to understand what agency/agencies or coalitions at the state and national level are setting the policy agenda and make sure that they are receiving the NAEP information in the timeliest manner.

There is still a perceived lack of awareness of NAEP, particularly among certain stakeholders (like parents).

Innovation

Innovation is considered to be even more important, especially to modernize NAEP and ensure its continued relevance. As one person stated: “I don’t think an idea can be too big for a five-year workplan.”

For example, there would be value to innovate ways more people could make better use of NAEP. And fundamentally, how does a bureaucratic agency itself, become innovative and accelerate its learning cycles?

AI is top of mind for everyone, with different perspectives on application (test item creation and scoring to the impact on how and what students learn, as well as ethical considerations). Significant concerns are about copyright infringement if NAEP were to use AI to generate items, and bias if AI were to score responses. There was also a concern with lack of transparency for scoring. Does AI change the skills we are measuring, or need to measure?

A primary interest is summed up by the question: “how might we produce or enable more actionable insights without being prescriptive?”

Top line ideas include:

- Offer online courses (particularly for parents and teachers) about NAEP.
- Could there be an academic partnership(s) for designing and delivering NAEP course, such as professional development for teachers?
- How might we get local school systems to better understand NAEP and get greater buy-in, so that it is not just the state Departments of Education?
- Investments in linking and interoperability connecting to other governmental and private data bases as allowable by law. Linking to other data sets was frequently mentioned.
- Rethink the point-in-time assessment model and consider creating a longitudinal cohort.
- Revisit the relationship of NAEP data with career development and occupational skills and reflect the many pathways a learner can take – not just college bound.
- Does NAEP account for opportunity to learn?
- How can we be nimbler about content design?
- Ethical use of AI policy.
- Need to address issues of equity and culture.
- How do we make 12th grade NAEP valuable?
- Building a coalition of states that committed to the 12th grade reading and math assessments to prove their value is still important.
- Could we form a kind of a partnership with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library for the release of Reading results? We could use a place like Imagination Library to get the people’s attention, also because they have such a gold standard reputation also.

- How could NAEP track schedules of states conducting periodic standard setting and curriculum adoptions and provide NAEP tools for their use?

Gold Standard

There is broad consensus that NAEP remains the gold standard and key to this standard is its credibility. The biggest threat is not changing fast enough to remain relevant. A second concern is losing bipartisan support. To maintain this gold standard, NAEP/NAGB/NCES should be more aggressive to make the case for the budget required.

There was a recommendation to define what the gold standard means, such as:

- Methodological rigor
- Validity and reliability
- Ethical standards
- Meaningful point-in-time and longitudinal trends

That said, there is concern that NAEP could lose this recognition if it fails to keep pace with advances in education and technology. NAEP could also lose constituent support and one person posed the question that needs to be addressed is: “why have so many parents, educators, policy leaders become complacent or opposed to assessment?”

Revising the history/civics framework offers a particular challenge and this review needs to stay away from politics. There is also the need to include information literacy in the frameworks, including social media. “I think as long as we stick to the reading proficiency, the math, the science and the civics, or the history in the 12th grade, we’re fine as long as we always stay away from any kind of social issue or commenting on that because we’re so divided as a nation.”

Finally, several board members considered how would NAEP/NAGB change if it were established today. For instance, should new legislation be considered to do things like making Science a mandatory subject, or would the composition of the board be different?