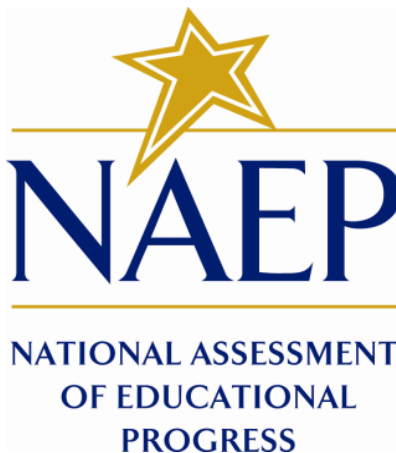


NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

NAEP Study of First-Year Texas Postsecondary Students 2010 Pilot Test

Summary of Findings and Lessons Learned Report

(NAEP SDC Special Study Task 8)



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OMB# 1850-0803 v.33

Contract# ED-07-CO-0079

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Highlights

Early in the fall semester of 2010, nine public colleges and universities in Texas participated in a pilot study designed to evaluate the operational feasibility of administering the 12th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and math assessments to incoming first-year postsecondary students. The following points provide a snapshot of major highlights from the study methods and results:

- The participating institutions generally provided excellent cooperation and support throughout the pilot, especially given the short lead time for planning the data collection. They provided student lists required for sampling, student contact information, active recruitment of students through the college administration, on-campus facilities for conducting assessments, and other assistance.
- Experienced and specially trained NAEP Supervisors and Assessment Administrators performed data collection activities for up to two weeks at each campus. They conducted a multi-mode recruitment effort using landline and cell phone numbers, e-mail, regular mail and text messaging. At each campus, 15 or more assessment sessions were scheduled over five days to give students flexibility on when to attend.
- No monetary or in-kind incentives for students were provided by the project. Most of the colleges did provide some form of small thank-you gift and/or refreshments to students who attended the assessment.
- Despite extensive and collaborative efforts to recruit students for the pilot, the student response rate was 20.7 percent overall. The response rate for specific schools ranged from 7.2 percent at one 2-year community college to 33.3 percent at one 4-year university.

Given the research objectives and sampling requirements for a large scale, statewide administration of the NAEP assessments to first-year postsecondary students in Texas, the NAEP Alliance has recommended against proceeding with the planned main study unless significant enhancements are

made to support higher response rates. Chief among these would be the addition of cash incentives for students who complete the assessments, longer lead times to prepare for data collection at each campus and a comprehensive information campaign to increase awareness of NAEP and generate interest in the study among the sampled postsecondary students.

Background

The congressionally authorized National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the only continuing source of comparable national and state data available to the public on the achievement of students at grades 4, 8, and 12 in core subjects. The National Assessment Governing Board (Governing Board) oversees and sets policy for NAEP. NAEP and the Governing Board are authorized under the National Assessment of Educational Progress Authorization Act (P.L.107-279).

Among the Governing Board's responsibilities is "to improve the form, content, use, and reporting of [NAEP results]." Toward this end, the Governing Board established a national commission to make recommendations to improve the assessment and reporting of NAEP at the 12th grade. In its March 2004 report¹, the commission noted the importance of maintaining NAEP at the 12th grade as a measure of the "output" of K-12 education in the United States and as an indicator of the nation's human capital potential. The commission recommended that 12th grade NAEP be redesigned to report on the academic preparedness of 12th grade students in reading and mathematics for entry-level college credit coursework. The commission concluded that having this information is essential for the economic well being and security of the United States and that NAEP is uniquely positioned to provide such information.

As the Governing Board has been developing ways to implement the commission's recommendations, there has been a wider recognition—among federal and state policymakers, educators, and the business community—of the importance of a rigorous high school program that results in meaningful high school diplomas and prepares students for college and for job training. The Administration has set the goal of ensuring that every high school graduate is college- and career- ready. Enabling NAEP to report on 12th grade preparedness would provide an indicator that can be used to monitor this goal.

¹ See http://www.nagb.org/publications/12_gr_commission_rpt.pdf.

As part of implementing the commission's recommendations, the Governing Board planned a program of research studies to support the validity of statements about 12th grade student preparedness in reading and mathematics.² Among the studies planned was a proposed study of first-year postsecondary student performance on the NAEP mathematics and reading assessments.

The data resulting from this study could be used, along with the results of the other planned studies, to help develop valid statements that can be made about the preparedness of 12th grade students in NAEP reports. While other studies, such as NCES high school longitudinal studies (e.g. NELS, ELS, HSLS), provide information relating achievement on assessments and high school grades (assessments developed specifically for the study as well as AP Exams, ACT, and SAT scores) to college placement and success, the NAEP Study of First-Year Texas Postsecondary Students could provide valuable empirical linkages between NAEP achievement and college placement, which has not previously been examined.

However, the Governing Board and NCES also recognized that administering the NAEP assessments to postsecondary students could involve special challenges. These included: the willingness and ability of colleges and universities to participate and support the NAEP data collection; the various logistical hurdles such as obtaining appropriate sample frames for students, obtaining student contact information, contacting and recruiting students, obtaining appropriate space to conduct the assessments on campus; and of course, student response rates. Therefore, a comprehensive pilot study was viewed as essential before proceeding with the full-scale study. This report focuses primarily on results from the formal pilot study conducted in Phase 2 of this project.

Research Questions and Objectives

The NAEP Study of First-Year Texas Postsecondary Students was designed to help policymakers better understand the academic links between high school and college as they relate to preparedness for postsecondary instruction, as measured by the NAEP 12th grade math and reading assessments. Specifically, this study addresses two key research questions: What points on the NAEP reading and mathematics scales represent knowledge and skills required for entry-level, credit-bearing postsecondary coursework? And, conversely, what points on the NAEP scales are aligned with

² The full scope of the Governing Board's research agenda can be found on the Governing Board's website at <http://www.nagb.org/publications/PreparednessFinalReport.pdf>.

developmental or remedial instruction?

Ultimately, this research could require administering the NAEP 12th grade math and reading assessments to a sample of 6,000 to more than 20,000 first-year Texas college students, depending on the final research questions and analytical objectives. Given the study's potential cost and complexity, it was organized into four progressive phases of investigation designed to evaluate feasibility and guide the final research design:

Phase 0: Literature Review and Expert Panel Meeting;

Phase 1: Exploratory Interviews with Texas College Administrators;

Phase 2: Pilot Study (n = 600 first-year Texas postsecondary students);

Phase 3: Main Study (n = 6,000 to 20,000 students).

Because NAEP had never previously been administered in a postsecondary setting, a small pilot test of the administration methods was fielded in Phase 2 prior to embarking on Phase 3, the main study. The purpose of Phase 2 was to evaluate the operational feasibility of administering NAEP in Texas to a large and representative sample of first-year postsecondary students. A primary goal of the pilot was to determine what response rate could be achieved, both overall and for the individual colleges and key subgroups. Other goals included: exploring the ability/willingness of colleges to provide essential sampling and contact information about eligible students, their ability to successfully recruit sampled students to participate in NAEP, and their ability to provide necessary logistical support to administer the assessments on their campuses.

Input obtained from a literature review and Expert Panel recommendations in Phase 0, and from interviews with the pilot colleges themselves in Phase 1, guided the design of final methods employed in the pilot. However, there were two notable exceptions:

- The pilot did not employ monetary incentives to students, which were recommended in the literature and cited by the Expert Panel as necessary to achieve acceptable response rates. The reason was that the use of incentives would be inconsistent with standard NAEP administration methods. Replicating the standard NAEP procedures as closely as possible was deemed essential by the Governing Board and NCES to ensure comparability of results between the 12th grade and first-year postsecondary student samples.

- Assessments were not conducted during the colleges' summer orientation sessions, as suggested by some of the literature and Expert Panel members. The data collection contract was awarded in mid-June and OMB clearance was received in mid-August, making this timing for the assessments impractical. Also, most of the pilot colleges rejected the idea of administering NAEP during the orientation sessions due to time limitations. They explained that their orientation schedules were already overburdened with other activities.

Otherwise, the methods employed in the pilot aligned with the advice of the postsecondary assessment experts and the participating schools.

Methods

Sampling

Nine (9) colleges and universities were purposively selected for the pilot by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). Selection criteria included 2-year and 4-year degree programs and diversity with respect to size, selectivity, region, and racial/ethnic composition. The pilot colleges and universities were grouped into three data collection windows as follows:

Group 1 (September 13-17, 2010)

- University of Texas at Brownsville & Texas Southmost College*
- Texas A&M University
- West Texas A&M University

Group 2 (September 27-October 1, 2010)

- Austin Community College (Cypress Creek Campus)
- El Paso Community College (Valle Verde Campus)
- Lone Star Community College (Montgomery Campus)

Group 3 (October 4-8, 2010)

- Prairie View A&M University
- Tyler Junior College
- University of Texas at San Antonio*

(*Make-up sessions conducted week of October 11-15, 2010.)

Altogether, 1,332 students (148 per college) were initially selected for the pilot and recruited to participate. The starting sample was equally split between males and females and was further stratified based on developmental enrollment status, race/ethnicity and academic achievement. Eligible students were defined as those who completed high school any time from January-June of 2010, at a high school located anywhere in the U.S., and registered to attend classes during the fall semester at any of the nine pilot college campuses. Foreign, GED and home-schooled students were ineligible, as were online students who do not regularly attend classes on campus, and students who were no longer officially enrolled at the time of data collection. Following sample adjustments to account for these factors, the final eligible sample size was 1,234 first-year students across the nine pilot colleges.

Data Collection

Recruitment of students to attend the assessment sessions was a joint effort of the colleges and the NAEP field staff. The college's recruited sampled students by sending them a personalized letter from the college president describing the importance of this research and the key role played by NAEP in formulating national education policy. Hard-copy letters were mailed to students about 10-14 days prior to the assessment sessions. Included with the letter was a schedule showing the times and locations of NAEP sessions to be held on campus, a map of the campus showing the assessment locations, and an insert describing any thank you gifts offered by the college for students completing the assessment.

Colleges then sent the president's letter and enclosures to students via e-mail about one week before the NAEP sessions. For data collection groups 2 and 3, the colleges also e-mailed students the link to the "YouTube" site where they could view the latest version of the NAEP promotional video for high school students.

On the Wednesday through Saturday of the week preceding NAEP sessions at each college, the NAEP field staff called and e-mailed selected students to schedule them for a convenient session, answer questions and respond to any objections. Contact was attempted for all students with a phone number and/or e-mail address provided by the college. Multiple attempts were made to contact all students for whom contact information was provided, on different days and at different times of day. Staff left voice mail messages for students they could not reach. (Students were not re-contacted following a firm refusal.)

Assessments were conducted at central locations on-campus in facilities provided by the college. Generally 10-12 regular sessions plus 4-5 drop-in sessions were scheduled each week at each campus, covering all days Monday-Friday and different hours of the day. (Additional make-up sessions were also held at two of the colleges the week of October 11-15.) During the data collection week, the field staff called and/or e-mailed students to remind them to attend their scheduled appointments. These calls were timed for the evening before the scheduled sessions, or early on the day of the session, as appropriate. Students who missed scheduled sessions were reminded that they could attend any session later in the week, including several “drop-in” sessions. At their own expense, seven of the nine pilot colleges offered thank-you gifts to students who attended the assessments. Two offered USB computer “memory sticks”; one offered a memory stick plus 1.5 hours of community service credit; one provided a \$10 Target gift card plus a chance to win a 24 inch flat-screen TV; one offered a free lunch from the “Subway” sandwich chain; four provided some type of snack foods and beverages. Two colleges offered no gifts to students.

Special Challenges for Postsecondary Administration of NAEP

In preparing to administer NAEP in the postsecondary setting, it was important to recognize several key differences between the high school and college environments for data collection that would clearly impact both procedures and results. These included:

School Administration: The college setting is much less hierarchical and routine compared to the high school setting. College administrators have less control and knowledge of student activities and schedules throughout the day, and they cannot be as directive towards either the instructors or the students.

Sample Frames: The contents and availability of student lists for sampling vary widely from college to college, much more than we see across secondary schools within the same state.

Attendance Schedules: For high school students, daily attendance is generally mandatory and most students are at school at the same times Monday-Friday. College freshmen are not legally required to attend classes, have highly variable schedules and may be on campus less than five days per week.

Proximity to Assessment Site: Colleges and universities typically cover larger physical areas than high schools, with buildings and classrooms often far away from parking lots and public transportation. This can create a much greater burden on college students in terms of just getting to the assessment session, as compared to high school students.

Living Arrangements: The vast majority of high school seniors live at home with parents, while college freshmen may live on campus, at home with parents, or in private apartments and houses off-campus.

Telephone Status: An increasingly large percentage of college students do not have landline telephones where they live and can only be contacted via cell phone, e-mail, or regular mail. Some colleges are sensitive about releasing student cell phone numbers, personal e-mail addresses and other contact information. And, cell phone users are often more wary about answering calls from numbers they don't recognize, making it harder to contact them during recruitment.

All of these predicted factors impacted our data collection experience in the Phase 2 pilot. Although we had prepared to encounter these problems, they were still disruptive at times and ready solutions were not always available. For example, we were unable to contact large numbers of students due to old or disconnected phone numbers or inactive e-mail addresses. The colleges were generally quite helpful but could only provide corrected contact data if they had received it from students. We know that some of the recruitment letters signed by college presidents were sent to students' home addresses, not to more recent in-town or on-campus addresses. Mail delivery to dorms was not always timely, nor was the students' attention to their "snail-mail" boxes. These factors affected both our success in contacting and recruiting sampled students and our ability to provide effective follow-ups and reminders to ensure they attended the assessment sessions.

Role of the THECB

To enable more rapid organization and execution of the study, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) offered in late 2009 to assist the National Assessment Governing Board and NCES in conducting this study at public colleges and universities in Texas. In March of 2010, the Texas Commissioner of Higher Education, Raymund Paredes, sent a letter to the Presidents of 12 Texas 2- and 4-year public institutions asking for their support and cooperation in conducting the Phase 2 pilot (see Exhibit 1). This request resulted in quick agreement from nine

schools to participate in late March and April, making it possible to start planning the Fall 2010 data collection in June through August. Without the active support of the THECB it simply would not have been possible to field this study in 2010, and the earliest data collection window for the pilot would have been delayed to Fall 2011, at the earliest.

Roles of the NAEP Alliance Members

Following are the specific roles and activities performed by the NAEP Alliance members in conducting this project:

- **Educational Testing Service (ETS)** was responsible for identifying and convening the Expert Panel, preparing the OMB clearance submission (including the analysis plans for assessment results), revising the NAEP 12th Grade Background Questionnaire for use in the pilot, and providing general coordination among the Alliance members working on the project.
- **Westat** was responsible for designing and implementing the Phase 1 interviews with pilot colleges, obtaining college IRB approvals, preparing field instruments and manuals, hiring and training the field staff, planning and conducting all Phase 2 sampling and data collection tasks, performing the nonresponse bias analyses, and preparing this report.
- **Pearson** was responsible for preparing and shipping the assessment booklets and related administration materials used in Phase 2, and scoring and processing the completed NAEP assessment booklets.

Exhibit 1

Introductory Letter from THECB Commissioner R. Paredes to Pilot Colleges

Texas has been asked by the National Assessment Governing Board (Governing Board) to participate in a small pilot study that will lead to better information about the academic preparedness of 12th grade students for postsecondary education. The purpose of the pilot is to determine the feasibility of administering the 12th grade reading and mathematics tests of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to a sample of incoming first-year college students, to better understand the academic links between high school and college.

NAEP, as you know, is the only nationally representative source of data on student achievement. It is administered across the country to a large sample of students in grades 4, 8 and 12 and is regarded as the Nation's Report Card. The Governing Board oversees and sets policy for NAEP; the National Center for Education Statistics administers NAEP.

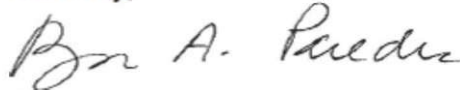
We believe that a successful pilot, followed in 2011 by a full-scale study, could provide us all with valuable empirical linkages between high school performance and new data on the necessary knowledge and skills needed to enter credit bearing, post-secondary education coursework.

The pilot is scheduled for the summer/fall of 2010. It will be conducted in Texas at up to 12 colleges, representing a mix of 2-year and 4-year institutions. Only 75 students will be needed per institution. An external contractor will be responsible for administering the tests. However, the contractor will need on-campus assistance in assessing feasibility, identifying and recruiting students, and in providing a location for the testing and other logistical support. The contractor will reimburse you for the administrative costs associated with your support.

Following NAEP guidelines, all information will be kept confidential. No individual student scores will be reported, nor will institution-specific scores be calculated or reported. This study has the full support of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and your participation in the pilot study will be greatly appreciated.

If your institution is willing to participate in this study, please send me the name and contact information of an individual that can assist the contractor by Friday, March 26. If you have questions about the study please contact Ray Fields at ray.fields@ed.gov or 202-357-0395. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,



Raymund A. Paredes

c: Ray Fields

Successfully administering NAEP in the postsecondary environment would require extensive support from the sampled colleges and universities. Therefore, one of the most important research questions going into this pilot study was, to what extent would the pilot colleges be willing and able to participate fully in the NAEP data collection process? As it turned out, the participating institutions provided excellent cooperation and support throughout the pilot, especially given the short lead time for planning the data collection (early August through early September) and the constant pressures on staff and on-campus facility resources. All of the pilot colleges provided student lists required for sampling, student contact information, direct administration support in notifying students about the study and recruiting them to take part, on-campus facilities for conducting assessments, expedited institutional review board (IRB) reviews, and other vital assistance.

The next major question was, to what extent would the sampled students participate? We knew that gaining cooperation among the first-year college students would be a considerable challenge, especially in the absence of financial incentives. Therefore, extensive efforts were put into contacting, recruiting and following up with all sampled students to achieve the highest possible response rates. Experienced and specially trained NAEP Supervisors and Assessment Administrators performed data collection activities for up to two weeks at each campus. They conducted an intense multi-mode recruitment effort using landline and cell phone numbers, e-mail, regular mail and text messaging. At each campus, 15 or more assessment sessions were scheduled over five days to give students flexibility on when to attend.

However, these intense data collection efforts proved insufficient to overcome other priorities and time pressures faced by the sampled students (which in many cases included work and child care responsibilities in addition to schoolwork), the difficulties involved in contacting students, and/or their general lack of interest in the study.

Despite the extensive and collaborative efforts to recruit students, the combined student response rate across the nine pilot colleges was only 20.7%. The low response rate appeared to be caused by a combination of factors, but primary factors included students' busy and varied schedules, the low salience or importance of the study for this population, the lack of lead time to promote awareness of NAEP, and the absence of monetary incentives.

It's notable that, even among students who agreed to participate when contacted, only about half attended the NAEP assessment sessions. This suggests a very low commitment level to the study. It's also notable that virtually no students had negative reactions about the study itself or being asked to participate. Field staff reported that outright refusals were very rare. When contacted, students were much more likely to agree to attend the assessment and then just not show up. Most no-show students contacted with follow-up calls indicated that they just forgot about the study or got busy with other school work or personal matters. Many students agreed to attend an assessment session or drop-in session multiple times when contacted on the phone, but then failed to attend any of them. These "passive refusals" are difficult to overcome, as subjects will often agree to participate just to get off the phone with the recruiter.

The response rate at individual campuses ranged from 7.2% at one 2-year community college to 33.3% at one 4-year university. In general, the 4-year universities exhibited a higher response rate than the 2-year community colleges. However, this was not a consistent pattern at the individual college level and one 2-year community college had the second-highest response rate at 33.0%, while one 4-year university had a response rate of 15.7%.

A nonresponse bias analysis found that males and females and developmental and non-developmental students responded at similar levels to the assessment. Students at two year colleges had lower response rates overall than those at 4 year colleges, as did students with lower SAT/ACT scores compared to students with higher scores. While Hispanics showed higher absolute response rates than the non-Hispanic White and Black/African-American samples, the difference was not statistically significant.

This section of the report summarizes the most important lessons we learned from the Phase 2 pilot study as they relate to the prospects for administering NAEP in the postsecondary setting going forward. We also provide recommendations for improving implementation of similar research in the future.

Working with the Colleges and Universities

College and university administrations are keenly interested in the college preparedness issue and are willing and able to participate in administering NAEP to support research efforts in this area. We found broad-based interest and engagement in this research across multiple functional areas and administrative levels at the pilot colleges, not just staff implementing a directive from the university president. This suggests that future efforts to study academic linkages between the secondary and postsecondary student populations would also be well-received.

The role of the THECB was vital to keeping the pilot on schedule and helping to cut through “red tape”. The endorsement of this study by the THECB and the strong appeal for cooperation and support provided in the letter sent by Commissioner Paredes to college presidents proved invaluable. This would be an essential element for future similar research in Texas or other states.

The role of the contact person/study liaison assigned by each college was also vital to the successful planning and execution of sampling and data collection. It is critical that this person have good working relationships with and knowledge of the registrar’s office, provost, student affairs, director of research & evaluation, director of IT/information systems, and the facilities manager.

There is a direct tension between the sampling and data collection tasks for this project and the need to assess students early in their first college semester. A key goal of the research design was to administer 12th grade NAEP to first-year college students before they received much postsecondary instruction. Otherwise, the test results could provide invalid information on the students’ level of preparedness before arriving at college. But for some colleges it was a challenge to provide complete student characteristics and contact information needed for sampling and

recruitment as early as August-September. Enrollment lists change as students are added and deleted, students who recently moved to the area have not had time to update their contact information, and some academic records and other student characteristics data have not yet been entered into the college information systems. It would be useful to continue to explore ways to extend the data collection window or sample a subset of students for whom the needed data can be made available earlier in the semester.

More work is needed to compensate for the absence of the NAEP infrastructure and long history of operations in the K-12 setting, which benefit and support NAEP data collection today but do not exist in the postsecondary world. This means that far more lead time (than was available in the pilot) is needed to prepare postsecondary administrators and students for the sampling and data collection process, and to promote awareness of, and interest in, NAEP among students and faculty. In order to effectively prepare for a fall semester data collection window, it appears that formal planning and coordination activities with the colleges should begin the preceding January, in parallel with planning for the summer orientation sessions.

Summer orientation sessions are not useful for data collection, but are useful for promoting awareness of NAEP. During Phase 1, we learned that while all of the pilot colleges provide some form of summer orientation for first-year students, none of them were willing to schedule NAEP assessments during these programs. All explained that the orientation schedules were already overloaded, and students had very little free time available during the sessions. Instead, all of the pilot schools indicated that using the orientation programs to promote awareness of NAEP, explain the benefits of the postsecondary research, and advertise the school's support for the project would be the better strategy.

The process of applying for IRB approvals at each individual college or university is schedule and labor intensive. In a large scale, statewide study involving several dozen colleges it would either be necessary to add a large home-office staff dedicated to this task, or work with the THECB or other appropriate state agency to obtain a coordinated approval accepted by all the participating schools.

Recruiting the Students

The logistical differences in conducting NAEP data collection in high schools versus the postsecondary setting will require using incentives to obtain comparable response rates.

The fact that colleges and universities cannot provide the “captive audience” that NAEP generally encounters in the high school setting means that some aspects of the NAEP data collection protocol should be re-engineered and tailored to the postsecondary setting. It appears that acceptable response rates will not be obtained unless monetary incentives are used.

Cell phones, texting and e-mail are the most popular forms of communication for postsecondary students, but each presents some unique problems. This information is protected by some colleges and could not be provided to the project in all cases. Advance negotiations are needed with some colleges and universities to gain the release of this contact information. Also, cell phones present pros and cons for the recruiters. While having access to the student numbers is essential, relying only on cell phone contact is often not effective. Virtually all cell phones include caller ID displays, so users can check the incoming number before answering. Unfamiliar numbers may not be answered. Also, students often turn off their cell phones while in class or at the library, making it difficult to reach them with reminder calls during the day. Solutions for this include using cell phones for the field staff that have local area codes, leaving appropriate voice mail messages to inform students about the purpose of the call, and promoting awareness of NAEP in advance to increase the likelihood of callbacks.

Separate, dedicated recruitment and administration teams may be useful in raising student response rates, and could be more efficient for large-scale postsecondary surveys. During the pilot, the same teams of field staff that administered NAEP at each college also performed the recruitment and reminder phone calls to students. As we increased efforts to contact more of the sampled students and added more reminder calls during the assessment week, this became burdensome for the assessment administrators and supervisors in some cases. Separate teams dedicated to either contacting/recruiting students or administering the NAEP sessions would be able to specialize and focus all their attention on the one task area, by working in waves through the data collection period. While one team administers the assessments, the other could move on to begin recruitment at the next college, while also handling reminder calls for the first school. This would also allow us to assign the best telephone recruiters and the best administrators to the applicable teams.

The NAEP Best Practices Manual provides valuable guidance to administrators for

improving response rates at colleges. It can be revised to better reflect the postsecondary setting and provided to study coordinators earlier in the year for use in planning response rate strategies. It could also be used as background material for focus groups and brainstorming sessions with coordinators from multiple colleges to generate ideas for improving student response rates. (However, this would require allowing the participating school contacts to know each other's identity.)

Multiple, convenient assessment locations are needed to optimize student participation. However, space for conducting assessments on campus is at a premium, so advance reservations are needed. With more advance lead-time most schools would be able to ensure space in several locations rather than just one or two as was the case in the pilot.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Given the research objectives and sampling requirements for a large scale, statewide administration of the NAEP assessments to first-year postsecondary students in Texas, the NAEP Alliance has recommended against proceeding with the planned main study unless significant enhancements are made to support higher response rates. Chief among these would be the addition of cash incentives for students who complete the assessments, longer lead times to prepare for data collection at each campus and a comprehensive information campaign to increase awareness of NAEP and generate interest in the study among the sampled postsecondary students.

We should note that the pilot also generated a number of positive findings about the design and objectives of the pilot. For example, relatively few students actively refused to participate. We found no evidence of *negative* student attitudes toward NAEP or the assessment process, per se. None of the contacted students requested accommodations or complained about the administration methods. While this does not indicate there is no need for accommodations among the postsecondary students, this finding does suggest that this issue was not a factor in the response rate results.

Also, none of the contacted students commented on the study's access to academic records, which was mentioned in the recruitment letter from college presidents. The NAEP supervisors and assessment administrators were specifically trained and instructed to actively listen for any student comments on this topic, as well as the accommodations issue, and carefully record any such comments. None were reported.

Finally, the degree of cooperation and engagement in the study provided by the pilot colleges and universities was exceptional. In part this was due to the high-level support from the THECB, but it was clear that the participating administrators had a strong interest in this research and the goal of better understanding the academic linkages between high school and college. The issue of academic preparedness among first-year postsecondary students was a high priority at all of the pilot colleges.