

NAEP's Future Role—Ideas from the Board's 25th Anniversary Symposium

In preparation for this discussion on Saturday, May 17 Board members are encouraged to review the materials in this tab, along with other web resources from the Governing Board's 25th Anniversary Symposium. The purpose of the Saturday discussion is twofold:

1. To discuss future priorities for the Board's role in setting policy for NAEP.
2. To discuss strategies for ensuring the Board's most important priorities are communicated and attained.

Materials included in this tab:

- Summary from Board Minutes of February 28, 2014 – Mark Musick's 25th Anniversary summary and outlook
- Transcript (excerpt) from February 28, 2014 discussion—Mark Musick's presentation followed by Board Q&A

Additional web resources on the 25th Anniversary Symposium:

<http://www.nagb.org/25thanniversary.html>

Issues and Outlook: Discussion of the 25th Anniversary Symposium

Mark Musick, 25th Anniversary Planning Committee member and former Board Chair, shared his comments on the themes of the Symposium. He also provided his perspective on the future of the Governing Board and NAEP.

Mr. Musick stated that the Board is moving in the right direction and is in a strong position in its current initiatives. He stated that the Board should remember that its guiding principle, as stated in the Symposium video, is to “safeguard NAEP as the gold standard,” and meet the “challenges and opportunities to ensure NAEP’s integrity as a trusted measure of student achievement.”

Mr. Musick outlined some common themes presented during the Symposium:

- Expand the reach and impact of NAEP.
- Maintain NAEP as the gold standard in assessment.
- Ensure the integrity of NAEP as the “truth teller.”
- Focus on the Board’s role as an independent body, which is responsible for reporting on student achievement.
- Stay true to the Board’s core mission, but look for ways to push the envelope on issues.
- Promote NAEP as a valuable tool in reporting academic achievement of the nation’s students.
- Make NAEP results more accessible to a wider audience.

Mr. Musick stated that the biggest challenges confronting the Governing Board are the ability to strike a balance between carrying out its mission and “pushing the envelope” by venturing into new areas which historically has proven to be successful.

He remarked that the “NAEP Goes to College” Symposium session ideas could pose a challenge as the Board advances the 12th grade preparedness initiative that is currently underway. However, it would be meaningful to create a link to address the issue of remedial college education, one of the biggest problems facing the country.

In addition, Mr. Musick noted that the Board is moving in the right direction with the use of technology in assessments and reporting. More needs to be done in the area of using technology to engage students and parents with NAEP.

In terms of NAEP’s primary audience, he stated that it is important to recognize that NAEP is for the public and it is important to not only report the data, but to ensure the public understands what the results mean and how to use them. NAEP has made tremendous progress over the years, but it is important to go beyond the results and ensure the information is disseminated to those who can use it and will have an impact.

Board Meeting Transcript (Excerpt)

February 28, 2014

Discussion of the 25th Anniversary Symposium

Mark Musick, Symposium Planning Committee Member

and Former Governing Board Chair

MR. MUSICK: Walking into this room for me was a Yogi Berra moment, I guess. It was a deja vu. Although I will say to you it is wonderful to be here today, but I am glad you are here every three months and in-between meetings. And I have had my time at this table, other than this day, which I appreciate.

Mary Crovo asked me to come and be a part of the symposium and then to make some comments today about what I heard at the symposium and about the future of the Governing Board and NAEP and what perspectives I might bring to that. And I will try to do that.

I thought that the sense of direction that I heard, particularly from David and Cornelia's opening remarks [at the 25th Anniversary Symposium] seemed right to me. I would say first of all, too, that the National Assessment and the National Assessment Governing Board today, you are not Blockbuster or Kodak or BlackBerry. You are in a position of relative strength and potential rather than weakness and deficit. And that is a good place to be.

The sense of the right direction that David just spoke to and that I thought both he and Cornelia spoke to in the very opening comments -- now, most meetings that I go to, the opening few comments are really made so

everybody can get in the room and get their seats -- but David and Cornelia actually said something Wednesday and I thought what they said, frankly, stood out at the end of the meeting, as well as the beginning. David began and if you listen closely to the last 30 or 40 seconds of [this video](#), probably all you need to do is transcribe that and hand it out and let us all memorize it and then try to follow it. The trying to follow it is where the problem lies. And I will get to that here in a moment.

David talked about expanding the reach and impact of NAEP, about NAEP as the Gold Standard. I did say Wednesday evening that Gold Standard was the most widely used term at the symposium, in my opinion. David talked about insuring the integrity, NAEP as the truth teller, another one of the most honored roles of the Board and the independence theme was echoed by several persons, including the newest Board member, I believe, in her comments on Wednesday evening.

And then David said, you said Wednesday morning, we need to stick to our knitting and push the envelope. And I think that is exactly right. However, sticking to the knitting can sometimes get sticky as you try to push the envelope. And I think I will say a little bit more about that in a moment. And David concluded his comments Wednesday by talking about providing valuable information, which is a theme that I will come back to.

Cornelia's term Wednesday that NAEP has been good for America and the Governing Board has been good for NAEP, that is sort of the kind of theme that you can hang a hat on. And I think both of those are correct.

And then she very quickly talked about where improvements could be made and she went to reporting the results, making them more accessible, faster and better achievement-level reporting, and new audiences. And she

talked about providing information in a consumable manner. And I like that.

Now, there are a couple of places where I think the Governing Board may need to travel faster, even though I think it is traveling in the right direction, or even change the vehicle in which you are traveling or get on a somewhat different path.

First, I think the biggest threat to NAEP and the biggest challenge to the Governing Board is in David's mantra of sticking to the knitting and pushing the envelope. We heard it Wednesday from one of the speakers, and that is, we tend, we as a country, we as individuals, we as organizations, tend to push success until it overloads and overwhelms.

In the earlier days, of course early on in NAEP's existence, we didn't have to worry about pushing success because of the Governing Board; we hadn't had any yet in 1989 and '90 and '91. But very quickly we began to see this problem, which I think you face, and that is a feeling of overloading the wagon or overloading the airplane, if you want to update the analogy.

If you are talking about automobiles, imagine the most tricked-out vehicle you could -- every option possible. People and organizations want to overload the NAEP wagon, or what we used to say, they want to love NAEP to death. And your challenge as you deal with subjects and schedules and budgets and sticking to your knitting and pushing the envelope, you are going to have to say "no" to a lot of good ideas. And knowing when to hold them, knowing when to fold them, and knowing when to walk away, that is why you are here. That is why Congress, in its wisdom, created the National Assessment Governing Board because it requires a group like this who can pitch it up in the air and toss it around and debate it, and can come

down generally on the right side of the situation with an answer that makes sense for America.

Now, part of that relates to the independence issue. There were several references, including by, as I said, your newest Board member. And I think the independence issue can be seen sometimes as inside baseball but Board members understand the issue of the independence of the Governing Board and that relationship to the integrity of NAEP and NAEP results better than anybody else.

If there was a disappointing part of the 25th Anniversary to me, it was the relatively little congressional participation. We talk about the Congressional role in the founding of NAEP but we didn't have much Congressional presence testifying for NAEP for the Governing Board, for the importance of independence on this inside baseball kind of issue.

Some people may say this is inside baseball and some of it is until it isn't. It is like it doesn't matter that your smoke alarm batteries are out of date until you have a fire. And the independence issue only becomes important when there is a problem, at least that was my experience and I think that remains.

And it gets to this issue of national and federal and you, the Governing Board members, are charged with walking that national-federal line for the National Assessment.

Now, sticking to the knitting and pushing the envelope, one of the places where this gets sticky, in my opinion, and we heard this Wednesday, I am going to say I heard it on the "NAEP Goes to College Proposal," which, in my opinion, is a quagmire full of alligators for NAEP measuring the actual BA or BS. However, and I heard this

morning in your Reporting and Dissemination Committing meeting, the issue of remedial developmental collegiate education is one of the biggest problems facing this country. And it is not a big leap from NAEP 12th grade, NAEP 12th grade preparedness to freshman year preparedness. And I could see very much the role there where you are both sticking to your knitting, as you have been on the 12th grade work that has been underway for years now, and pushing the envelope and in helping solve, or at least address or manage one of the biggest problems in this country.

And I think this is a case where, and I thought the discussion in your Reporting and Dissemination Committee today got almost to the point just like this because it was basically pointed out that the 12th grade NAEP results are, and I am oversimplifying here, are more about what students know and the current issue in America is what are students prepared to do at the end of the 12th grade, not just what do they know. And linking those two together in a meaningful way is really important.

I also heard, the thing that I heard at the Symposium that was the most surprising to me, not that I am the authority by any means on NAEP but I thought I knew a fair amount, and I knew little about [the early NAEP that Richard Rothstein described](#). And I did know, I have read Ralph Tyler's five-page memo, but I didn't know about the early surveys, as they called them then, and the questions that were asked.

And I must admit I thought Arnie Goldstein's comment was very much appropriate, you can't ask those questions today. But I think the American people should know there was a time, not all that long ago, where these were the questions that were asked of our young people because it was a citizenship issue. So, we are focused on college-ready, ready for college, ready for career. We are

not too focused on ready for citizenship, I think would be Richard Rothstein's argument, and it is a pretty good argument.

And I don't know whether the early NAEP has anything to tell NAEP 2014, but I do think it is worth a little more thinking about, and there may be information there to share with folks about that.

And the thing that I came away with, for the early NAEP -- and Rothstein mentioned this in part but part of this was my reading and preparing for today -- is that Ralph Tyler talked a lot more about learning than I hear discussed today in NAEP circles. Tyler was much more focused. The terms achievement, the terms progress were used, because the very first committee, that exploratory committee, was about progress in education but learning is a word used less so.

Pushing the envelope, technology obviously was mentioned a lot. I think that in terms of the competency-based assessment, adaptive testing, digital reports, the NAEP Data Explorer, all of these things, I am confident that NCES and NAEP, the Governing Board, you will get these things right or you will get enough of them right because you will work hard on them and you have got the expertise.

Where I have my questions or doubts and where I would urge you to at least consider some attention is the technology, the role of technology that will allow, enable, or encourage students and parents to engage with NAEP. I think there is something there and I don't have the answer to this. I just know that when the NAEP items are your most visited website place, that when young people can engage in all sorts of games these days, web-based games, surely somebody is smart enough with a little parental encouragement to help both parents and students engage with NAEP, NAEP items, and NAEP information in a way that you

just haven't considered yet.

And imagine that taking a NAEP test or dealing with or engaging with NAEP items might be a learning exercise. And that gets us back to Ralph Tyler, if you will, and that assessment, a link between assessment and learning.

And I guess I could ask for a show of hands but I think I am too smart to do that. I will admit there is one hand that would go up because I haven't seen the over 90 new math questions that were released from the 2013 math test or the over 60 reading questions that were released from 2013. And I suspect that I am not alone in America in that regard. And I follow NAEP reasonably closely. So, there is an opportunity there of some measure that I don't know exactly what it is.

And finally, I would come back to where I kind of finished [in my remarks on] Wednesday night. I think the reporting of NAEP results is just by results. I mean that broadly.

As I was thinking about this meeting today and thinking about what needs the most attention. And so even in NAEP's earliest days or in its pre-NAEP days as it turned out, when I went back to 1963 and read what Tyler and Keppel were saying and they were talking about the importance of understanding of parents, not parents but the results being understandable, being clear, they had all of these words. You heard both David and Cornelia's comments when they opened the conference. Darv Winick talked about an increased public understanding. Roy Truby said the nine-word sentence that he thought was the most important in NAEP's history: that the National Assessment of Educational Progress is for the American public. Those results are for the public.

Now, we have made real progress and I held up the 1990 report and I held up, this happened to be, a 2010 report. That is progress. I mean this is clearly less is more. But I would say -- and what I heard today in the Reporting and Dissemination Committee was encouraging to me. Some of the themes sounded a little familiar, but that is understandable.

And I appreciate, I think it was the Chair's comment today, he said NAEP, we are attempting to be more activist, and I appreciate that, to go beyond results and show how results are relevant. And the struggle with audiences and with communication strategies, that was all there.

And we all know that no matter what you do, it will never be enough. But there is something to be done, I would say, in terms of the message and the messaging.

In terms of the message, getting the information understandable, as Tyler said, making it valuable, as David said, providing it in consumable manner, as Cornelia said, and remembering every day that NAEP is for the American public.

Now, in the messaging, I think the primary problem or challenge you have, and it is one that I had at the Southern Regional Education Board where I spent a few years, is that we would work and work and work and work on a report, on a study, to get it right, to get our message right. And then when the report was, in the old days, printed and mailed, staff wanted to, and I probably said a thousand times and they really got tired of me saying this, now we go to work.

I mean the issue is getting this information in the hands of people who can use it and putting it in ways where it will have an impact or be relevant, which were

other terms used in today's Reporting and Dissemination Committee. And I just don't get the sense, and this organization is not the only one, by far, by any means -- as I said my old group that I worked for, we were guilty. We spent more time in producing the results than we did in sharing the results. Or we spent more time producing the message than we spent on intensity in messaging.

And I know you get into the -- I know the cause and effect issues. I know most of the arguments about what NAEP can and can't say and what is legitimate. But to be relevant, to have an impact, to provide insights, and that was a word I didn't hear Wednesday, that part of what NAEP was about, maybe there were some insights in here. If they were, they were darn hard to find. I can assure you of that. And to the extent that NAEP can provide insights or point to where the insights might be found, to me is an important role for the Board.

I certainly would not be, I am not and would not be discouraged by anything I heard Wednesday, by anything I see on the media horizon. You are in a position of relative strength to deal with all these problems. It is following this mantra of sticking to the knitting and pushing the envelope and knowing that there is no formula for that. But it takes the kind of input that you have from your many different perspectives around this table.

CHAIR DRISCOLL: Thank you, Mark. It was very important and thank you for taking the time and the effort to put so much thought into it. You obviously have a very unique perspective. I have always valued your advice. And you have always been kind to give it in a constructive way, that is always valuable because you recognize the pitfalls. So, you are not one that says, 'Well, why don't you just do this?' So, it has been very helpful.

I want to open it up. I just want to make two

quick comments. I was interested that you talked about using technology to engage parents and students in NAEP. And that may be something we explored and maybe have dropped back too far.

I challenged this Board to make a difference and that led to a number of things and some interesting blue sky suggestions. And one of them was that we have in the daily newspaper, you know, when you pick up your daily newspaper, you may do the Sudoku or you may do the crossword puzzle. You may look at the comment of the day or something. Our thought was to have a NAEP question of the day. And we found out, by the way, that it is very expensive and difficult to get into a newspaper of any circulation.

You know we have been talking about this issue. Jim Popham is leading a group to look at what we think is very important, which is really to get people to understand assessment. And so we are trying to play that role. And again, it feels like we are pushing the envelope. It is probably not our job, in a way. There is just such a void out there of people that really understand what it is about.

Please take advantage of Mark being here. He has a fabulous perspective and knowledge and history. And we are struggling with a lot of things. Just today, we talked about the issue of this report we give out. We embargo it, we do all this, and then two days later it is gone. And yet there are all these important facts in it. And we get them in the report but they are lost. And every report has -- we heard this morning in the closed session -- some very interesting aspects of not just the results but the characteristics of students and so forth.

So with that, let me open it up. Comments?

Questions? Tonya?

MS. MILES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A comment, then a question. One, I wanted to thank you, Mr. Musick, for your comments and your delivery.

And then the question I have is could we get a copy of the transcript of his address? Because I think he really walked through so many different points and so many different strategies for how we move to the next step.

CHAIR DRISCOLL: So that is a good point to stop and ask Cornelia what can we expect from all the activities?

MS. ORR: So the comments that Mark made today will be actually documented in our formal Board meeting transcript. And we think that it would be a good idea to connect that with the 25th Anniversary. So, from the 25th Anniversary meeting, there will be a complete audio of the two sessions that weren't video live streamed. And for the two sessions that were video live streamed, we will have that video. And that will be on a site so we can go back and hear it, as well as some of the reports and papers that were written as part of the presentation.

Anything else to add, Mary?

MS. CROVO: Great idea, Tonya. Because I think this is really rich material for our continued discussion. I think these are incredibly important remarks that you can have in your hands in written form to inform our upcoming discussions.

CHAIR DRISCOLL: Lou?

MR. FABRIZIO: With all of the materials, can that include the five-page Ralph Tyler letter that you

referenced?

CHAIR DRISCOLL: Yes, we can get that. Yes, it is really interesting history. It is just fabulous, really. What I have said -- I don't know if this will make sense to you, Mark -- we talk about Francis Keppel not being able to answer the question during a congressional hearing, which is how we got NAGB: how are our kids doing? Well, I think we have answered that question. I mean we answer it in spades. We answer it for ethnic groups. You know, we have got more data on how kids are doing in America. So, we have answered that question.

But the next question is who knows about it, I mean, we are certainly pleased with the Gold Standard. We have all these anecdotal stories and other important stories around in Tennessee for example, they are delighted to have the NAEP results showing that they are making great progress and so forth.

So, we have all that and the inside baseball people know how great we are but we are still not on the tip of everybody's tongue in America. So, that is kind of the next issue.

So, the answer is yes, we now can tell you how American students are doing. I don't think the general public is particularly paying attention to what we do.

Terry?

MR. HOLLIDAY: Just as a follow-up, a lot of good speakers on Wednesday. I couldn't attend every breakout, but I did get to the two where fisticuffs were imminent. And I found a lot of good recommendations that Mark has kind of put together in his summary.

But I am wondering: what is our next step? Will staff bring back to us some materials that say, here are the big things we might want to tackle more clearly. Our assessment level definitions, we might want to tackle more clearly, as well as the parent outreach with social media. I am just wondering what the next steps are from all of the good feedback we got during the 25th Anniversary.

CHAIR DRISCOLL: And therein lies the rub. That is right but the staff is lean and mean, as you know. But part of the responsibility is to summarize. And then it is going to be up to us, once that is done, to translate that into some action steps.

Shannon?

MS. GARRISON: So one of the things I am hesitant to say because you were talking about the famous seven-word sentence, or nine-word sentence, when we talk about NAEP being for the general public, I always have such an issue with that because general public means so many different things. American people means a lot of different things. There are students. There are teachers. There are parents. There are researchers. And when we say that these NAEP reports are for the American public or the general public, you really can't say that because it needs to be differentiated for different audiences.

MR. MUSICK: When that was adopted, we were coming off the mid-1990s when early on NAEP was at ECS [Education Commission of the States], it was said that there were three technical experts who wrote the NAEP report. And when it moved to ETS and this new much more complicated system started, we used to joke that there were only three persons in America who could read, who knew, who understood. And so it was out of that. I mean, I am not quibbling with what you said because there are many audiences but moving from Ed Haertel [at Stanford Univ.]

being able to understand this to the American people was, in our view, where we needed to go.

CHAIR DRISCOLL: So again, I think this gets back, Shannon. I don't think there is a wrong answer here. I think our responsibility was to Francis Keppel, to answer the question: how are our kids performing? And those results should be given to the American public, everyone. We certainly are not going to just give it to this one or that one. So, that is clearly correct.

Your point, however, gets to this actualization of it. It is fine to have them out there but what is going to happen? And Shannon, herself, uses the NAEP Data Explorer and worked with other teachers and so forth and so on.

So, we are very focused on trying to make it come alive, as you have commented. So, I don't think they are inconsistent. We have this broader responsibility, to be sure. But then we are trying to figure out, 'We have these nuggets. How do we get people out there excited about it?' If they just got excited about our items -- parents, et cetera -- it would be a heck of a step forward, particularly for all those states that used low standards in the past.

Jim and then Andrew.

MR. POPHAM: This is an opportunity to complain about technology. I guess where I see it coming together is that although it may be true that our audience is the American people, I think NAGB has a responsibility to provide evidence that the American people know what to do with. And that is why our move toward assessment literacy in response to the Chairman's call for making a difference makes so much sense to me because in fact there are those different audiences. And what we see tentatively in our little workgroup is that we are tackling parents and

grandparents. We are tackling policymakers, legislators, and Board members, and we are tackling students themselves. And those are the different audiences.

So, in a sense, what we are trying to do is make more useful information that people can employ. So if you simply present the data to the American people and you haven't helped them figure out what the hell to do with it, you have only done part of your job.

I wanted to follow up on your suggestion, Mark, about the questions and NAEP. Whereas it may be true, David, that it is costly to get it in newspapers, we have access to our own little electronic elves, and we could create a feature, literally a daily NAEP question or something like that on the website and so on. What did you have in mind, Mark?

MR. MUSICK: I did not have in mind buying something in a newspaper. I like it better when the New York Times prints nine questions at one time. But I don't know. I don't know in direct terms.

I do know that there are a lot of newspapers in America. There are a lot of weekly newspapers who would put this in. You would find a home for NAEP questions and not in the dailies, maybe not in the large dailies, but you would cover a lot of America through that.

There are just ways that I just don't think there has been enough focused thinking about what one or how one might engage. And of course I was thinking more of engaging the students on this.

CHAIR DRISCOLL: Andrew. That's the last word, I think.

MR. HO: David, I really am sympathetic to what

Shannon said. There are so many different audiences out there. Jim made the same point.

You actually raised in closed session a possible strategy that I just want to highlight and that is to make sure that there are partnerships that exist that we take advantage of as a Board that can translate the message to their respective audiences and stakeholders.

I think the consequence of that is that we lose control of the message. On the other hand, the message gets to more people, in a way that is potentially relevant to them. That takes a little bit of the heat off of us, as far as trying to frame or message these results and, what is more, enhance the stakeholders.

So, my last question to Mark would be what partnerships do you think we could take advantage of in this arena that we might say here is the truth as we see it? Now, you interpret it and deliver that to your stakeholders and that might be an approach to broaden our message. Do you see any partnerships that are possibilities there?

MR. MUSICK: Very quickly, and I would say on the assessment literacy, which I agree with Jim Popham about, but obviously, the College Board, ACT, and all of these other companies that are putting results into the hands of students and parents, I mean believe me, these folks are interested in assessment literacy as well. And so, I would not see the assessment literacy fight as one in which you would be carrying the only spear. And in fact, if you don't have at least a battalion or more, you are not going to be successful.

David, if I can make one final comment, it is for Board members.

CHAIR DRISCOLL: Well, I will give you a final comment but we are going to let Andres speak.

MR. ALONSO: Three succinct sentences. The first one is that there is a technical imperative that we are always struggling against in trying to message and convey the message in a way that touches the ideal client.

The second one is, and this has been from the time that I joined the Board, part of what I have heard David say is that we need to rethink the notion of who is the ultimate customer or client for the information.

And thirdly is that if we rethink the mission around that element, then how we do many, many, many things here has to change. And what you heard today in our committee was us trying to wrestle with those three questions. And I am very, very hopeful.

One other thing, and this is for the benefit of everybody, we tweet a NAEP question every single week. But I think, and I am going to quote one of my colleagues here without naming that colleague. We probably need some kind of a scandal so that our number of followers goes up by ten-fold.

(Laughter.)

MR. ALONSO: So, anybody who wants to volunteer for the good of the order, just reach out to me.

CHAIR DRISCOLL: It is probably easy enough just to give the wrong answer and then have everybody yell at us for the wrong answer.

Last word, Mark Musick.

MR. MUSICK: Well, the last word is simply for Board members. I was reminded of this yesterday in a conversation -- part of my term was with Secretary Riley as

Secretary. And as you know, we were handed some difficult issues in those days, including the Voluntary National Test.

And the Secretary called me over to his office one day and he wanted to talk. And he wanted to make sure the Board -- you have got to listen now, Mark. The Board has got to listen. And Dick Riley may be my favorite elected official of all time and he had been Chairman of my Board at the Southern Region and so I have known him a long time. And I listened.

And finally, and I was very respectful of course, I said, Mr. Secretary. I said, our problem, and I think it is still your problem, I said the problem of the Board is we are getting advice to go 360 for every degree point on the compass, all 360 degrees and we have to choose one. And when we do, nearly everybody else is going to think we weren't listening to them.

So, I think you are probably faced with the same dilemma today but it is why you are here.

CHAIR DRISCOLL: Well, and let me just say I will take the last word to thank you and really on behalf, not just you yourself, personally, and what you have done, but the other chairs. There have only been six chairs of NAGB in our history. One has passed away, five are still here.

And what you collectively represent today is a tremendous history. We are the Gold Standard. We are the truth teller because of the integrity that you showed and your members showed.

The report had it right. The Alexander James report had it right. But it works. And it works because people come with great backgrounds. The nominations

process which somebody talked about is so important. But you represent the tremendous integrity and accomplishment that really has been remarkable in this country.

So, I want to thank you on the one hand for setting the stage for us. On the other hand, it is your fault for making such a high bar; it makes it tough. So, Mark, thank you so much.