

## **The National Assessment Governing Board's Strategic Planning Initiative**

The Governing Board has embarked on a Strategic Planning Initiative to identify opportunities to advance the Governing Board's statutory mandate as set forth in P.L. 107-279 and ensure that the Governing Board continues to play an important role in informing policymakers, educators, and the public about student achievement in our nation. Information about the Governing Board's Strategic Planning Initiative can be found at: <https://www.nagb.org/content/nagb/assets/documents/what-we-do/quarterly-board-meeting-materials/2015-11/14-strategic-planning-initiative-update.pdf>. The Governing Board intends to finalize its Strategic Plan at the August 2016 Board meeting; this plan will be implemented through the year 2020.

### **External Input for the Governing Board's Consideration**

Previous Governing Board discussions noted the value of receiving input from external education stakeholders prior to finalizing its draft Strategic Plan. To provide this external perspective to the Board for this meeting, the Governing Board hired a consultant to conduct conversations with 22 individuals identified by the staff who are respected education leaders, familiar with NAEP, and represent a diverse range of perspectives to generate ideas for the Strategic Plan. The individuals who participated in this effort generously volunteered their time and spoke with the promise of confidentiality regarding their individual comments. The following document is the final summary report produced by the consultant, Jim Kohlmoos of EDGE Consulting Partners (who will be in attendance during the Strategic Planning Initiative plenary session to answer questions).

The Governing Board staff discussed the Governing Board's priorities and Draft Strategic Plan Activities document with the Policy Task Force hosted jointly with the Council of Chief State School Officers. A summary of the feedback provided by the Policy Task Force is included in these materials.

These materials are provided to inform the Governing Board's discussion on the scope and direction of the draft Strategic Plan.



**The National Assessment Governing Board's  
Strategic Planning Initiative**

***Report on Feedback from External Stakeholders***

Submitted by

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*Report prepared under contract to the National Assessment Governing Board.*

## Overview

The National Assessment Governing Board (Governing Board) is in the process of developing a Strategic Plan to guide its work on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for the next five years. As a part of that development process, the Board contracted with us at EDGE Consulting, LLC to collect input from a diverse group of education stakeholders and experts representing different parts of the education policy community who are familiar with NAEP and its various uses and components. The Governing Board sets policy for NAEP and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) administers the NAEP program. The advice collected from these stakeholders about NAEP did not always account for the distinctions between Governing Board and NCES responsibilities for the NAEP program. Using a set of general “trigger” questions relating to NAEP, we conducted one-on-one telephone conversations with 22 stakeholders over a three week period in January and February of 2016.

In this report of the conversations, we provided a summary of the common themes and noteworthy individual comments that emerged from five sets of questions about different aspects of NAEP. In the conclusion, we summarized the feedback gathered through these conversations to offer ideas for the Board’s consideration.

## Participating Stakeholders

- Jack Buckley, former NCES Commissioner, Senior Vice President for Research, The College Board
- Michael Casserly, Executive Director, Council of the Great City Schools
- Matthew Chingos, Senior Fellow, Urban Institute
- Michael Feuer, Dean of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development, George Washington University
- Checker Finn, former Board Chair, Distinguished Senior Fellow and President Emeritus, Thomas B. Fordham Institute
- Kati Haycock, President, The Education Trust
- Freeman Hrabowski, III, President of University of Maryland, Baltimore County; Chair of President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for African Americans
- Jack Jennings, retired Executive Director, Center for Education Policy
- Richard Laine, Director of Education, National Governors Association
- Dane Linn, Vice President, Business Roundtable
- Sarah Theule Lubienski, Professor of Mathematics Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- Margaret McCloud, Deputy Vice President, National Council of La Raza
- Joe McTighe, Executive Director, Council for American Private Education
- Chris Minnich, Executive Director, Council of Chief State School Officers
- Mark Musick, former Board Chair, President Emeritus, Southern Regional Education Board
- Michael Petrilli, President, Thomas B. Fordham Institute
- Delia Pompa, Senior Fellow, Migrant Policy Institute
- Roberto Rodriguez, Deputy Assistant to the President for Education, White House
- Eric Rodriguez, Vice President, National Council of La Raza
- Andrew Rotherham, Co-Founder and Partner, Bellwether Education Partners
- Greg Toppo, Education Writer, USA Today
- Robert Wise, President, Alliance for Excellent Education

## Approach

We employed an exploratory research approach to gather feedback about a predetermined set of basic “trigger” questions about the various components of NAEP and the Governing Board’s preliminary priorities. Best suited for the earlier stages of planning, t

Our goal was to create an open and informal conversational telephone “atmosphere” for eliciting candid and informed observations and opinions about the key issues thus far identified for the strategic planning process. Specific components of our approach included:

**Participants:** Pre-selected by the Governing Board staff, the participants reflected a sampling from eight pre-arranged categories of different, yet overlapping perspectives (policy, think tank, research, teacher/parent, non-public education, business, media, and Governing Board alumni). Special considerations were also made to ensure gender and racial/ethnic diversity. The stakeholders voluntarily agreed to the conversations and were made fully aware that, while their participation in the conversations would be made known to the Board, the content of the conversations would be confidential with no comments directly attributable to any one participant.

**Discussions:** All of the discussions were conducted via the telephone at pre-scheduled times. The conversations lasted on average 40 minutes. We used a number of “trigger” questions initially drafted by the Governing Board staff to facilitate open-ended conversations regarding different aspects of NAEP. It should be noted that we orally shared the Governing Board’s four preliminary priorities with the participants but did not provide any draft materials created by the staff. To further create a candid conversational “atmosphere” over the telephone, we chose to use our own manual notetaking system for documenting responses rather than using an audio recording device during the telephone discussions. Using this conversational approach, we found that stakeholders provided rich descriptive responses to the various prompts.

**Analysis:** Using an online spreadsheet program, we were able to cross-tabulate our notes from all of the conversations into topical categories. This allowed us to more readily identify common themes that emerged from the comments, as well as unique and noteworthy individual observations and considerations. The summary of the feedback in this report is organized in this fashion.

## Summary of Feedback

We asked each stakeholder a standard set of questions covering four core topic areas: greatest value, usefulness, key components, proposed priorities. For each category, we asked more specific sub-questions when appropriate, as well as cross-cutting questions relating to missing features and new ideas.

### Greatest Value

*We began our conversations with an open-ended question about the greatest value of NAEP in today’s educational landscape. The answers were quite consistent across all stakeholders with some important individual observations.*

## COMMON THEMES ABOUT VALUE

- **A barometer at its best:** There was near unanimous agreement among the stakeholders that NAEP's greatest value to the education landscape is in the way it provides a national snapshot of performance at a particular time and tracks national trends in achievement over time. This core value was expressed in a variety of different ways using nouns such as "barometer", "benchmark", "yardstick", "rubric", "marker of progress", "indicator", "validator", and "gold standard". Each of these connotes a different nuanced meaning but it was clear that the core measurement factor was viewed as highly valuable.
- **Highly positive adjectives:** Almost all of the stakeholders used very positive adjectives to further describe the value of NAEP. The comments fell into two different but interrelated groups. The first group of descriptors related to NAEP's independence (e.g., "independent", "free of political distortion" "respected", "third party"), while the second grouping was focused on the methodological integrity and stability (e.g., "reliable", "unimpeachable", "consistent", "ongoing", "realistic", "trustworthy", "Rock of Gibraltar"). One stakeholder went so far as to call NAEP a "national treasure" emphasizing that the trove of data and information is of jewel-like value to the country.
- **A catalyst for policy:** Most stakeholders commented on the value of NAEP as a catalyst for policymaking by raising awareness about strengths and weaknesses in performance. There was general acknowledgement that the Governing Board does not provide solutions but rather spotlights problems and challenges requiring further action. In this way, NAEP was generally viewed as an attention-focusing tool for policymaking without taking sides. One stakeholder described NAEP as a "clarion call".

## NOTEWORTHY INDIVIDUAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT VALUE

- **Elevating education research:** NAEP has elevated the credibility of education research as a field. NAEP results over the past 40 years have helped the education research community establish a role in the policymaking arena even though evidence is still not used frequently or well by policymakers
- **Comparisons of rigor:** The value of NAEP has increased as the challenges to the Common Core State Standards have intensified and increased. The stakeholder based the comments on a perceived fundamental need in education policymaking for state comparisons about the relative rigor of various states' standards, as well as actual results about student performance within the states.
- **De facto national standards:** Two stakeholders stated that NAEP is the penultimate measure of student achievement and suggested that NAEP serves as a de facto set of national standards and therein lays its greatest value.
- **International comparisons:** A number of stakeholders believe that one of NAEP's greatest values is the data that can eventually be used to make international comparisons about student performance. One stakeholder in particular suggested embedding a number of questions from Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in NAEP assessments.

- **Causality or not:** Several stakeholders mentioned that many policymakers are tempted to use NAEP to make causal claims about a particular policy or intervention even though NAEP program experts advise against doing so. These stakeholders also observed that policymakers who use NAEP properly to comment on correlations and general tendencies while avoiding issues of causality tend to value NAEP very highly.
- **Questions not answers:** Several stakeholders emphasized that NAEP is and should remain fundamentally a stimulus for asking the right questions rather than answering them. As a credible source of data about performance, NAEP serves as the critical reference point for further research and development work in identifying root causes and generating potential solutions.

### Usefulness

*We asked the stakeholders to comment on the relative usefulness of NAEP to six different audience groups (i.e. policymakers, researchers, administrators, teachers, parents, students). In order to allow for a broad range of answers, we purposely used general descriptions of each audience. We also encouraged the stakeholders to share their perceptions of how each audience group currently uses NAEP and how it should be used in the future.*

#### COMMON THEMES ABOUT USEFULNESS

- **The big challenge about utilization:** Awareness and understanding of what NAEP is and what it offers goes hand in hand with its utility among the various potential audiences. Most stakeholders commented that there is confusion about NAEP and how it compares with and relates to PISA, TIMSS and state assessments. Some stakeholders admitted that even they lacked a full understanding about the differences, including the differences between what one stakeholder referred to as “old NAEP and new NAEP”, presumably relating to the Long-Term Trend and Main NAEP assessments.
- **Very useful to some federal and state policymakers:** There was near unanimous belief among the stakeholders that NAEP is most useful to federal and state policymakers by informing their decision making about education. But many stakeholders also indicated that policymakers tend to use NAEP in ways that best suit their individual interests at a particular point in time during the policymaking process. While these interests vary widely by circumstance and timing, they fall into three general categories: 1) to bring attention to a particular educational problem or issue; 2) to help formulate a policy or one’s own position within a policy area; 3) to justify or legitimize already-established beliefs. Stakeholders also cautioned that many policymakers tend to do superficial, less-nuanced analyses of NAEP data which can lead to misinterpretations and misuse particularly in terms of causation. Many stakeholders mentioned that, while the Governing Board cannot control how others use the NAEP data within the policy arena, the Governing Board should continue to provide and improve upon user guidelines and tools for what NAEP can and cannot tell us. Focusing additional attention on helping policymakers make meaning of NAEP results was urged by most stakeholders.
- **Highly useful to certain types of researchers:** Stakeholders also indicated that, similar to policymakers, NAEP can and should be highly useful to researchers,

particularly those who are conducting descriptive research, identifying problem areas for additional research or using the contextual data to draw correlational relationships. Several stakeholders noted the significant differences between researchers involved in advocacy and those engaged in knowledge-building and problem solving. The latter group tends to clearly acknowledge the limitations of what NAEP can tell us in terms of causality and variation. On a somewhat contrary point, several stakeholders commented that, while NAEP is and should be highly useful to researchers, it is still underutilized by researchers for a variety of reasons, including insufficient training in using and analyzing NAEP data.

- **Very mixed views about administrators' use:** According to most stakeholders, the majority of local administrators do not find NAEP data useful for improvement or decision-making purposes primarily because of the lack of data specific to their particular systems. When NAEP data are used, it is usually for the purpose of setting a general national or state context for understanding more specific issues related to a school district. The exceptions to this are those administrators from Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) districts. Most stakeholders viewed TUDA as an exemplary initiative for how NAEP data can be translated into strategies for instructional improvement. But, when pressed for specifics, the stakeholders tended not to be fully aware of specific examples for how this is done by the TUDA districts beyond recognizing general patterns in broad areas. Several stakeholders were concerned that both state and TUDA data are used to make “horse race” judgements about states or districts without a full understanding of contextual factors.
- **Not so relevant for most teachers, students, parents:** The vast majority of stakeholders believed that NAEP is minimally useful to teachers, students and parents because the data do not give them meaningful information about individual student performance. While national, state and TUDA results could provide some useful contextual information about systemic issues affecting individual performance, most stakeholders felt this was not commonly done by these audiences. One stakeholder mentioned that in a meeting with state Teachers of the Year most were not aware of NAEP findings. Several stakeholders did mention, however, that teachers and parents, as well as students who are involved in some form of advocacy, are potential big users of NAEP. Three stakeholders who are deeply involved in advocacy felt that NAEP data can and should be used to stimulate a sense of urgency and scale among parents and teachers for taking action and engaging in advocacy activities. With more simplified, user-friendly access to data, advocacy-oriented students, parents and teachers could be significant users of NAEP.

#### NOTEWORTHY INDIVIDUAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT USEFULNESS

- **Not quite causality:** One research-oriented policy-focused stakeholder wrestled with the natural instinct of policymakers to use NAEP to make causal claims. The individual suggested that it is legitimate for policymakers to “reach some broad inferences about how we are doing and why and look at trends with confidence in the data to understand variation...” but expressed deep concern about those policymakers who inappropriately draw causal inferences about their favorite or least favorite policies.
- **Common Core issues:** Several stakeholders raised concerns about the perceptions of policymakers and the general public about the recently released 2015 NAEP results in reading and mathematics for grades four and eight, and how these results



might be related to or affected by the move to the Common Core State Standards. These concerns were rooted in questions about alignment and whether or not this is the appropriate time for NAEP to be adjusted to reflect changes in state standards. One of the stakeholders mentioned that the controversies surrounding the Common Core have actually elevated NAEP's use as a credible way to compare the rigor of state standards and state proficiency levels.

- **Evidence-free zones:** A stakeholder who is involved in policy and research observed that policymaking at the federal and state levels is equivalent to an evidence-free zone where empirical evidence is minimally used to formulate policy. But this person was hopeful that NAEP could be used to trigger higher levels of interest among policymakers in the use of evidence and evidence-informed policymaking.
- **Access to test items:** One stakeholder strongly advocated for providing teachers and students (and perhaps parents) with access to a sample of test items. This stakeholder did not know that released NAEP test items are on the NAEP website, and suggested that test item access would promote greater use of NAEP by not only contributing to improvements in instructional practice as a formative assessment tool but also stimulating greater public interest in and support of NAEP.

### Key Components

*We asked the stakeholders to comment freely about seven key aspects of the NAEP program (national, state, TUDA, subjects, grade levels, context, achievement gaps) and what should be preserved, changed or discarded. Here is what they had to say:*

#### COMMON THEMES ABOUT KEY COMPONENTS

- **National data:** There was unanimous agreement among stakeholders that the concept of the Nation's Report Card is at the core of NAEP's value and utility both for its snapshot of achievement levels and its measurement of progress over time. But many stakeholders expressed some concerns about this national picture including: confusion in the field between "old and new" NAEP; NAEP's relative value and meaning compared to TIMSS and PISA; its relevance to local and state policymaking; and, media's tendency to oversimplify findings in creating a narrative about the overall quality of US education. Most stakeholders suggested that many of these concerns could be mitigated by improved communications and public engagement strategies rather than through substantive changes to the assessments themselves.
- **State data:** Most stakeholders rated the importance of the state data equal to or slightly less than the national data. There were some clear concerns about how state data prompted a "race horse" interpretation of the data without taking into account critical contextual factors. But, stakeholders were generally pleased by the multiple purposes of these data including: the value of having comparisons across states for descriptive analysis; a means to compare state-administered assessment scores; a benchmark for state standards; a means of promoting transparency about the relative rigor of state standards and proficiency levels; a basis for understanding variance among states; and, a national reminder of the de-centralization, fragmentation and diversity within the American education system.



- **TUDA:** The stakeholders universally viewed TUDA as an exemplar for using NAEP data to drive improvement in instructional programs, to provide meaningful and transparent information to the public, and to advance the use of powerful empirical evidence for improvement. Many expressed appreciation for the leadership (and courage) of local administrators and the Council of the Great City Schools for subjecting themselves voluntarily to this type of results-oriented scrutiny.

Several stakeholders speculated that TUDA will become even more valuable as state participation in Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced (SBAC) assessments wanes. But one somewhat skeptical stakeholder questioned whether TUDA has led to any significant insights or major changes in these large systems over the past 15 years. Most every stakeholder recommended expansion of TUDA to more locations. Two stakeholders suggested that the Governing Board consider piloting an adaptation of TUDA for rural districts around the country.

- **Grade levels assessed:** There was general agreement that the 4th and 8th grade assessments were appropriate and useful and should be maintained. Several stakeholders offered some “light” considerations for several alternatives including moving to age-defined groupings, similar to PISA, and switching from fourth grade to third grade assessments.

Many stakeholders also shared the belief that 12th grade data were problematic --- less useful, reliable or credible. Much of the concern suggested a lack of awareness among stakeholders of the NAEP research concluding that 12th grade NAEP results are not adversely affected by student motivation issues, as some posited, and can serve as an indicator for college readiness. The stakeholders floated a wide range of suggestions for how best to improve the usefulness of NAEP at the secondary level including: eliminate the assessment altogether; substitute NAEP with ACT and SAT to address what was perceived as a misalignment issue with Common Core State Standards; shift to 11th grade assessments to deal with perceived motivational problems in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade; or move to post-12th grade measures to better measure college/career readiness. We note the disconnect between the research and perceptions regarding the utility of grade 12 NAEP for the Governing Board’s examination.

- **Breadth of subjects assessed:** Most stakeholders perceive NAEP as a standard bearer for what is important in American education. Thus, the subjects to be assessed, as well as the frequency of the assessments, send a message to policymakers about priorities. Stakeholders all agreed that the core subjects of math and reading are an essential part of NAEP and should be maintained at least at their current level of frequency. This is directly linked to the stakeholders’ overall agreement that longitudinal trend data holds NAEP’s greatest value. It also is connected to the perceived predictive power of math and reading for achievement in other subjects. A number of the stakeholders resonated with this point.

There was less agreement among stakeholders about the frequency of the assessments of other subjects. Science was most frequently mentioned as a viable candidate for expansion in line with the rollout of the Next Generation Science Standards and the growing acceptance of the role of Science Technology

Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education in workforce development. Two stakeholders also mentioned the social studies assessments, especially civics, as possibilities for more frequency but with somewhat less enthusiasm for the potential political fights. In general, most stakeholders did not favor expanding science or other subjects at the expense of the core subjects of reading and mathematics.

- **Contextual and achievement gap data:** Most stakeholders agreed that contextual data and data about achievement gaps were extremely important for cross tabulations, correlations and providing baseline insights into variations in performance. But many stakeholders expressed concerns that the data are underutilized and not well understood. A number of serious challenges were identified by stakeholders including: the complexity and nuance of correlations between scores and contextual data, the frequent misuse in drawing causal inferences, the lack of reliability in self-reporting about demographic information, inconsistent definitions across states about certain subgroups (e.g., English language learner (ELL) and special education), the need for what one advocacy-oriented stakeholder called the “oversampling” of some subgroups, and lack of longitudinal information. There was general agreement that developing more user-friendly tools for collecting, mining and analyzing these data should be a priority for the Governing Board moving forward.

#### NOTEWORTHY INDIVIDUAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT KEY COMPONENTS

- **Measuring hard-to-measure competencies:** Several stakeholders advised that because NAEP is organized around subjects and grade levels, it does not adequately capture the use of interdisciplinary knowledge or deeper learning/21st Century competencies. These stakeholders did not have specific recommendations for changing NAEP but did express the general concern that NAEP needs to adjust to the changes in what students need to know and be able to do in order to succeed in the 21st Century marketplace. Taking a cue from the Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment in Education, one of the stakeholders surmised that NAEP’s future relevance will depend upon how well it adapts to changing conditions, learning needs and new technologies.
- **Getting ready for college and career readiness:** Related to the hard-to-measure competencies, several stakeholders commented that NAEP is not an adequate barometer for assessing college and career readiness due to misalignment with Common Core State Standards. Given the perceived problems with the 12th grade assessments, these stakeholders suggested that a special effort should be undertaken to overhaul this whole domain.
- **Understanding variation:** One stakeholder who was particularly outspoken against the misuse of NAEP data for making causal claims was nonetheless sanguine about how NAEP data can be used for better understanding variations in state performance over time. This person noted that most of the changes in state scores are frequently misinterpreted by the media by focusing on the incremental changes from the previous results rather than the trend over time. It is sustained change of performance over many years that is most important for making general assertions about possible systemic strengths and weaknesses that contribute to performance.

- **Promoting NAEP-based research:** One stakeholder suggested an idea for promoting research that uses and applies NAEP data. The individual suggested that the Governing Board create panels of scholars to identify and review research that uses NAEP data. This would not only provide case studies for professional development on how researchers can and should use NAEP but also provide an honest assessment of how NAEP is actually used. The stakeholder suggested that the Governing Board needs to take greater advantage of the expertise in the research community to help promote utilization. Another stakeholder suggested reestablishing a NAEP secondary analysis grants program for researchers to do deep-dive analyses of different data sets and create a rich set of recommendations for future action.
- **Speed:** A number of advocacy-oriented stakeholders stressed the importance of accelerating the speed by which NAEP data are released. Given the fast-paced changes in the education landscape, the two-year lag time on NAEP restricted use data is too slow for taking meaningful action.
- **Linking available administrative data:** One stakeholder made a strong case for expanding the richness of NAEP by linking NAEP data to existing administrative databases. This person surmised that, if technical and privacy issues could be adequately addressed, administrative data would provide deeper insights into the many contextual variables that are currently done by what the stakeholder perceived to be unreliable self-reporting surveys.
- **Definitions of proficiency:** In line with the comments about the Common Core, college and career readiness, and 21st Century competencies, one stakeholder urged that the Governing Board help redefine what proficiency means as it relates to what was termed “workforce development”. The stakeholder was specifically concerned about linking the education pipeline to economic opportunity and saw a role for the Governing Board in building that link through more research on what proficiency means in terms of performance.

### Priorities

*We asked the stakeholders to provide feedback about each of the four preliminary priorities that the Governing Board has recently developed for the next five years. The stakeholders commented on the relative importance and value of each priority and provided additional feedback.*

#### COMMON THEMES ABOUT PRIORITIES

- **A range of opinions about messaging:** There was widespread agreement among stakeholders that building a deeper understanding of and appreciation for NAEP and its various components is essential not only for expanding its use with more audiences but also for preserving the reputation and credibility of its brand. But stakeholders were split into two groups about the specific focus on messaging strategies. Some believed that messaging as a public relations tool deserves much attention in this dynamic political environment and could clear up the confusion over the differences in various assessments, like old and new NAEP, TIMSS, PISA and state assessments. Others felt the most serious needs run far deeper than messaging strategies and should be focused

on useable tools for facilitating utilization, interpreting results, and understanding scale scores. A number of stakeholders also raised questions about the need for communications strategies to parents, students and teachers when NAEP does not provide them with useable individualized information. Building targeted communications strategies for specific high priority audience groups, such as federal and state policymakers and the trade media, was advocated by several stakeholders.

- **Efficiency and cost effectiveness as a special focus?:** Most stakeholders questioned why a seemingly inward-facing management issue would be a priority for the Governing Board's special attention. They acknowledged that the Governing Board, like any other governmental agency, constantly needs to explore new and better ways to efficiently and effectively use limited resources, particularly in this current political environment. It is important to send Congress a strong message that this effort is indeed a high priority concern. But, on the other hand, many stakeholders suggested that this should be an on-going effort to be embedded into the management structure and performance systems of the NAEP program. Several stakeholders suggested that the Governing Board could convert this priority into a cross-cutting theme in the strategic plan and identify one or more other problem areas for high priority attention over the next five years.
- **Split opinions about innovation:** Most stakeholders agreed that innovation and research and development are the lifeblood of most any high performance government agency and should be a high priority focus for the Governing Board in the next five years. Some indicated that one of the reasons for the Governing Board's stellar reputation has been its on-going quest to improve and anticipate the changing dynamics in teaching and learning in the education marketplace. Several stakeholders echoed the Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment in Education's suggestion to adjust assessments to changing times. At the same time, most stakeholders voiced serious cautions about tinkering with one of NAEP's greatest values in tracking national and state trends over time. Some stakeholders suggested that NAEP's first priority is to "stick to its knitting" (an adage used independently by several stakeholders) and innovate very judiciously. The stakeholders held strong differences of opinion about the role and scope of innovation in the NAEP program.
- **Multiple benefits of external partnerships:** Citing TUDA as an exemplar, most stakeholders agreed with the high priority attention that the Governing Board should give to building external partnerships. Several stakeholders surmised that external partnerships could help address some of the communications challenges that the Governing Board has in messaging and reaching certain audiences. Thus, many felt that building external partnerships should be merged with the messaging priority and create some synergy for improving public awareness, generating additional public support for NAEP and encouraging more widespread use among its primary audiences. A blended approach to messaging and partnerships was strongly favored by stakeholders from advocacy organizations who represent underserved populations. These stakeholders were particularly concerned about the need for special accommodations and more consistent definitions of subgroups relating to ELL and special education students. A number of stakeholders who gave high praise to the TUDA initiative similarly suggested that the design of external partnerships should run deeper than just a communications outlet a few days a year and should focus on ongoing substantive analyses and application for advocacy, policy development and improvement purposes.

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## NOTEWORTHY INDIVIDUAL SUGGESTIONS ABOUT PRIORITIES

- **Addressing anti-testing sentiments:** Several stakeholders were deeply concerned about the potential for NAEP to be swept into the campaigns against standardized testing, the Common Core or even the Administration's own efforts to reduce over-testing. The anti-testing sentiment is palpable in the field and could negatively affect the participation of student test takers, diminish NAEP's public reputation and erode Congressional support. The messaging and partnership priorities will need to focus considerable attention on this serious public relations challenge.
- **Fixing college/career readiness/12 grade:** Several stakeholders advocated for high priority strategic attention by the Governing Board on fixing the aforementioned perceived problems with the 12th grade assessment and the need for better ways to measure college and career readiness. One stakeholder suggested that civic readiness be included. Another stakeholder suggested that the Governing Board might consider using its innovation priority to address this issue before taking on loftier innovative ideas and consider new frameworks for measuring these constructs.
- **Elevating utilization:** While all four of the proposed priorities could contribute to the expanded use of NAEP among different audiences, a number of stakeholders suggested that utilization be explicitly elevated to the top tier of priorities. Recognizing there is a limit to the Governing Board's role in facilitating use, third parties, such as think tanks, research centers and advocacy organizations which are closer to the field than the Governing Board could be deployed and/or commissioned to provide the kind of analysis that is useful to their constituencies. In this regard, providing more user friendly analytics is essential to expanded and effective use.
- **Keeping up with changing times:** Several stakeholders were worried about NAEP's continuing relevance and the perception that assessments in general are not keeping up with higher levels of learning now demanded in the workplace. The stakeholders warned not to let NAEP become the lowest common denominator for learning. By making measurement innovation a high priority, the Governing Board could provide more assertive leadership in sustaining NAEP as an essential benchmark, which will be needed all the more by states during the implementation of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). As the Common Core brand continues to face serious opposition, ESSA will stimulate greater demand for NAEP and the Governing Board should be prepared to address it.



## **Conclusion:**

### **Considerations for the Governing Board**

*During the course of the interviews, we heard many implicit and explicit pieces of advice for the Governing Board's role and the NAEP program moving forward. After reviewing the conversations in total, we offer the following curated ideas for the Governing Board's consideration. Please note that this list of considerations was not reviewed or approved by the participating stakeholders.*

**Developing a new potential role for the Governing Board:** We heard a wide spectrum of opinions from stakeholders about the Governing Board's future role in presenting findings and promoting use. Some urged the Governing Board to play more than a referee's role and become a more active participant in the analysis and application of findings. Others advocated just as urgently that the Governing Board maintain a transcendent position as a provider of data only. But, rather than pick sides, we suggest that the Governing Board could find a middle ground. By focusing significant attention on the external partnership priority, the Governing Board could build strong collaborative relationships with a large number of responsible intermediaries who subscribe to a set of guiding principles about appropriate uses and effective analysis. The Governing Board could thus put into place an expanded network of external partners who could serve as the translators and interpreters for target audiences. As the hub of this network of partners, the Governing Board could assume a brokering role for sharing NAEP-informed knowledge and facilitate collaborations among the partners and their respective constituencies.

**Bridging the gap between supply and demand:** NAEP provides data that require nuanced and complex analyses in order to be appropriately and effectively used for a variety of purposes among a diversity of audiences. Most of those audiences, particularly policymakers, seek what NAEP cannot give them on first blush: simple, understandable and useable answers to big complex questions. As the Governing Board has learned over many years, matching supply with demand in this case is immensely challenging. As suggested above, external partners that are equipped with effective tools of analysis and communication could provide the needed link between supply and demand in an emerging evidence-based marketplace in education.

**Striking a balance for innovation:** The above-mentioned feedback about the Governing Board's innovation priority reveals the inherent tension that many forward-thinking organizations encounter between sustaining and scaling current successes and developing and testing future-oriented innovations. This tension does not suggest an either/or solution. Our sense is that, in the case of the Governing Board, this tension between innovations and "sticking to the knitting" should be considered an on-going management issue that is regularly revisited by the Board to ensure proper situational balance and operational adjustments as needed.

**Focusing on "low hanging fruit":** As the Board ponders its strategic directions and priorities for the next five years, it will be critical to also address what might be construed as smaller tactical and technical issues related to NAEP collections and dissemination. During our conversations with stakeholders, we picked up an array of specific problems that may need to be addressed, such as recruitment challenges for private schools, inconsistent guidelines and definitions for ELL and special education populations, the slow pace of releases of restricted use data, difficult-to-navigate features of some websites, and the lack of awareness regarding released NAEP questions. A new priority NAEP may want to consider is how best to rapidly and systematically fix "low hanging fruit" problems that, if left unattended, could cause disruptions later.

**Combining messaging with partnerships to facilitate engagement:** Numerous stakeholders suggested blending the Governing Board's priorities for messaging and external partnerships. Rather than pushing out information through a traditional one-way dissemination process, knowledge transfer (and eventually utilization) demands two-way interactions between intended users and knowledge producers. The Governing Board itself would be hard pressed to directly manage such two-way engagement activities. However, through the blend of effective messaging strategies and strong partnership arrangements the Governing Board could be positioned to help facilitate a dynamic engagement process. This process could not only better inform intended audiences of relevant findings but also inform the Governing Board of user needs, interests and capabilities.

**Sustaining an evidence-based culture for improvement:** During our many conversations, we frequently heard high praise for the dedication and wisdom of the Board members and the staff. This may be partly due to the unique structure and governance system established by Congress for the Governing Board. But we also believe it is a credit to the culture of evidence and improvement that pervades the agency. These values inspired the Governing Board to seek feedback from stakeholders to inform its development and implementation of the Strategic Plan over the next half decade. In this regard, it is also important not to underestimate the vital role that skilled and knowledgeable leaders and managers play in managing this highly valued and challenging national treasure.



**National Assessment Governing Board /  
Council of Chief State School Officers  
Policy Task Force Meeting  
February 9, 2016**

At its February 9, 2016 meeting, NAGB-CCSSO Policy Task Force members engaged in a discussion on the Governing Board's Strategic Planning Initiative. The Task Force received an overview of the initiative and the Board's draft Strategic Plan Activities document to inform their discussion. Task Force members were asked to reflect on what efforts the Governing Board could take on to enhance the use of NAEP at the state level.

The comments provided by the Policy Task Force were consistent with the recommendations presented to the Governing Board at its November 2015 Board meeting by the Task Force's Vice Chair, Shelley Loving-Ryder. The Task Force was generally supportive of the Governing Board's vision, and their discussion points included the following.

Considering current and prospective Board activities, the Task Force expressed:

- Support for the suggestion at the November 2015 Governing Board meeting to convene NAEP State Coordinators to discuss how states have used NAEP data for initiatives.
- Support for maintaining the Long-Term Trend NAEP assessment to provide the public with the long-view of educational progress and decline for the nation, and support for NAEP trend results generally.
- Support for maintaining periodic assessment of a broad range of subjects beyond reading and mathematics, given that NAEP is the only nationally representative measure in these subject areas.
- Acknowledgement that NAEP assessments with state-by-state comparisons are more useful for state-level initiatives.
- Caution regarding expanding communications to parents and teachers because such communications may stretch beyond the primary purpose of NAEP, e.g., resulting in the possible misinterpretation that teachers should be teaching to the NAEP assessment.

Considering possible new activities, the Task Force suggested that the Governing Board:

- Expand efforts to communicate what NAEP results mean, e.g., having a gallery of infographics and informational videos on how NAEP can be helpful.
- Produce infographics presenting alignment information on how NAEP relates to other assessments.
- Provide a high school measure that is useful for states, e.g., a NAEP benchmark aligned to college and career readiness or an assessment administered before grade 12.
- Create more NAEP materials that states could use in their own communications to emphasize the importance of NAEP as an external reference and to explain why NAEP and state assessments may differ in what they measure.
- Link international assessments with NAEP to assure the continued relevance of the NAEP program and to provide states with additional useful benchmarks.

The discussion session concluded with Policy Task Force members requesting an update on NCES's Future of NAEP initiative at an upcoming Task Force meeting.

# National Assessment Governing Board

## Strategic Plan Activities – DRAFT

NOTE: This draft document is unchanged from the version discussed at the November 2015 Board meeting

### OVERVIEW:

The National Assessment Governing Board unanimously approved the Strategic Planning Framework document at its August 2015 meeting. In the Framework, the Governing Board identified the following overarching goals, representing the values to be upheld throughout the development and implementation of its Strategic Plan:

- ✓ *Keep NAEP a Trusted Brand;*
- ✓ *Be a Good Steward of NAEP's Assets;*
- ✓ *Assess a Broad Range of Subjects;*
- ✓ *Continue Innovating for NAEP;*
- ✓ *Improve Collaboration with NCES;*
- ✓ *Be a Voice in the National Conversation Surrounding Education and Assessment; and*
- ✓ *Engage Key Constituencies Especially Parents, Educators, and Policy Makers.*

The Framework included the following four priorities to guide the Board's development of a Strategic Plan:

- 1. Develop Messaging Strategies to Improve Understanding of NAEP within the Context of High-Quality Assessments Generally;*
- 2. Increase Efficiencies to Effectively Use NAEP Funds;*
- 3. Innovate Assessment Design to Keep NAEP on the Forefront of Measuring Student Achievement; and*
- 4. Strengthen External Partnerships to Promote and Support the Resources NAEP Offers.*

To accomplish these priorities, the Board discussed the value of identifying a select few activities to be integrated into the Board's work. In the drafting these activities, the Governing Board will take into account NCES' Future of NAEP Initiative and the distinct responsibilities of the Governing Board as an independent policy-setting body and of NCES as a statistical agency. At its November 2015 meeting, the Board will use this draft document as the starting point for considering what new activities the Governing Board should initiate or current activities it should expand. Details such as timelines for activities and the specific metrics to evaluate success will emerge as the details supporting each possible activity are clarified. The process of defining and refining the Strategic Plan will occur over the next year, with the goal of finalizing a Strategic Plan document at the August 2016 Board meeting.

### *Discussion Questions*

- Are these the right activities for the Board to be focused on for the next 3-5 years?
- Who do you consider to be the primary audiences for these activities; which target audiences should the Board prioritize?
- Do these priorities, strategies, and activities provide sufficient guidelines to decide whether or not to embark on additional projects that may be proposed during the Strategic Plan's implementation phase?

# National Assessment Governing Board

## Strategic Plan Activities – DRAFT

**Priority #1: Develop Messaging Strategies to Improve Understanding of NAEP within the Context of High-Quality Assessments Generally**

### *Strategy A – Advance New Reporting Strategies*

Emphasize continuous (rather than episodic) reporting strategies that focus on high expectations for students, highlight where progress is being made, and utilize social media to encourage greater use of NAEP data by providing target audiences with interesting, informative, and understandable information on an ongoing basis.

Actions to Accomplish	Target Audiences	Metrics	Timeline	Implemented by	NAGB Committee
i. Create infographics to promote greater awareness and use of NAEP results beyond what is traditionally included in initial result releases (including spotlighting contextual variables and student subgroup performance.)	Policymakers Educators Parents & Students	Materials created	TBD	NAGB staff & DCG contract	R&D
ii. Develop and implement a communications campaign that promotes the use of NAEP information to strategic external partners ( <i>see Strategic Plan priority #4.A.iii</i> ), including greater focus on social media.	Policymakers Researchers Educators	Communications Plan metrics	TBD	NAGB staff & DCG contract	R&D
iii. Host a series of seminar/webinar events to highlight secondary uses of NAEP data that inform research/policy/practice following Report Card releases.	Policymakers Researchers	Seminars/ webinars hosted	TBD	NAGB staff & contract TBD	R&D

## National Assessment Governing Board Strategic Plan Activities – DRAFT

**Priority #1: Develop Messaging Strategies to Improve Understanding of NAEP within the Context of High-Quality Assessments Generally**

### *Strategy B – Increase Understanding of Appropriate Uses of NAEP Information*

Develop and promote communications materials that increase the understanding of key stakeholders regarding the purpose and appropriate uses of NAEP to reduce inappropriate uses of NAEP and spotlight notable uses of the information.

Actions to Accomplish	Target Audiences	Metrics	Timeline	Implemented by	NAGB Committee
i. Synthesize secondary uses of NAEP data to identify the most common uses and evaluate the extent to which these uses are appropriate or desirable to inform content needs for target audiences.	Policymakers Educators Parents & Students Media Researchers	Analysis completed	TBD	NAGB staff & Focused Reporting contract  COSDAM	R&D  COSDAM
ii. Develop communications materials that explain what NAEP is and address common misuses/misconceptions. Tailor materials and messages for each target audience. <i>(To be distributed via communications campaign in Priority 1.A.iii.)</i>	Policymakers Educators Parents & Students	Materials created	TBD	NAGB staff & DCG contract	R&D  COSDAM
iii. Promote case studies/testimonials of impactful uses of NAEP data <i>(created via Strategic Plan priority #4).</i>	Policymakers Researchers	Communications Plan metrics	TBD	NAGB staff & DCG contract	R&D

## National Assessment Governing Board Strategic Plan Activities – DRAFT

### Priority #2: Increase Efficiencies to Effectively Use NAEP Funds

#### *Strategy A – Increase NAGB and NCES Staff Collaboration*

Increase the collaboration among NAGB and NCES staff on specific policy-related activities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of decisions with significant impact on the NAEP program.

Actions to Accomplish	Target Audiences	Metrics	Timeline	Implemented by	NAGB Committee
i. Provide input to NCES on the proposal development for the next competition of NAEP alliance contracts and the review of proposals received to support alignment between NAEP contract structures and the Board’s policy priorities.	NAGB NCES	TBD	TBD	NAGB Staff NCES	Full Board
ii. Develop a process to estimate marginal cost impacts of new policies being considered by Board, to inform the cost and benefit analysis of policy decisions.	NAGB NCES	TBD	TBD	NAGB Staff NCES	Full Board

## National Assessment Governing Board Strategic Plan Activities – DRAFT

### Priority #3: Innovate Assessment Design to Keep NAEP on the Forefront of Measuring Student Achievement

#### *Strategy A – Support Innovation in NAEP’s Design*

Identify opportunities for NAGB to support innovative NAEP assessment design.

Actions to Accomplish	Target Audiences	Metrics	Timeline	Implemented by	NAGB Committee
i. Ensure alignment of NAGB’s Strategic Planning Initiative with NCES’ <i>Future of NAEP</i> effort by increasing information sharing and collaboration between NAGB and NCES on the two initiatives and avoiding duplication of efforts to implement mutual goals.	NAGB NCES	Periodic briefings	TBD	NAGB NCES	Full Board
ii. Continue updating and improving NAEP contextual variables to enhance reporting and analysis opportunities.	NAGB NCES	Analysis conducted  Actions on policies ( <i>if needed</i> )	TBD	R&D NAGB staff NCES	R&D  ADC
iii. Explore the design options to conduct the Long Term Trend through other NAEP assessments.	NAGB NCES	Analysis conducted  Actions on policies ( <i>if needed</i> )	TBD	COSDAM NAGB Staff NCES	COSDAM

## National Assessment Governing Board Strategic Plan Activities – DRAFT

### Priority #3: Innovate Assessment Design to Keep NAEP on the Forefront of Measuring Student Achievement

#### *Strategy B – Enhance NAEP’s Implementation of Digital-Based Assessments*

Explore the opportunities provided by digital-based assessments (DBA) generally to identify potential innovative pursuits for NAEP assessments to be even more engaging, precise, and inclusive.

Actions to Accomplish	Target Audiences	Metrics	Timeline	Implemented by	NAGB Committee
i. Develop Board policy on DBA to inform NAEP’s assessment design with consideration for a variety of interrelated factors.	NAGB NCES	Policy developed	TBD	COSDAM	COSDAM
ii. Increase awareness of NAEP’s Scenario-Based Task design amongst the broader assessment community to support innovation in high quality digital-based education assessments.	Assessment Experts	Conference sessions	TBD	TBD	COSDAM



## National Assessment Governing Board Strategic Plan Activities – DRAFT

### Priority #4: Strengthen External Partnerships to Promote and Support the Resources NAEP Offers

#### *Strategy A – Leverage Social Media and External Partnerships to Promote NAEP’s Resources to Stakeholder Groups*

Identify ways to communicate more effectively to stakeholder groups to increase their use of NAEP.

Actions to Accomplish	Target Audiences	Metrics	Timeline	Implemented by	NAGB Committee
i. Gather feedback from external groups on the NAEP information and presentation needs for NAEP for stakeholder groups.	Policymakers Educators Parents & Students Researchers Media	Interviews, meetings, focus groups conducted and analyzed	TBD	NAGB staff	Full Board
ii. Identify strategic external partners (existing and desired).	NAGB	Partners identified	TBD	NAGB members NAGB staff	Full Board
iii. Strengthen external partnerships and leverage partners to expand the reach of NAEP’s messaging to stakeholder groups.	Policymakers Educators Parents & Students Researchers	Communications Plan metrics	TBD	NAGB Members NAGB staff & DCG contract	Full Board
iv. Develop infographics and tailored messaging to stakeholder groups, to be distributed via the communications campaign ( <i>see Priority #1.A.ii</i> ) and through Governing Board members’ networks.		Communications Plan metrics	TBD	NAGB members NAGB staff & DCG contract	Full Board
v. Connect with relevant national education events to promote and extend the coverage of NAEP releases.	Policymakers Educators Parents & Students	Communications Plan metrics	TBD	NAGB staff & DCG contract	R&D

# National Assessment Governing Board

## Strategic Plan Activities – DRAFT

**Priority #4: Strengthen External Partnerships to Promote and Support the Resources NAEP Offers**

***Strategy B – Promote Secondary Research Utilizing NAEP Information***

Increase impactful uses of NAEP data by encouraging secondary uses of the data.

Actions to Accomplish	Target Audiences	Metrics	Timeline	Implemented by	NAGB Committee
i. Create case studies/testimonials of impactful uses showcasing how NAEP data can be used appropriately as a resource for educational reform ( <i>to be promoted through Priority 1.B.iii</i> ).	Policymakers Educators Parents & Students Researchers	Communications Plan metrics	TBD	NAGB Members NAGB staff & DCG contract	Full Board