



Strategic Vision 2025 Annual Progress Report November 2021

Introduction

With the Strategic Vision unanimously approved in September 2020, Governing Board staff drafted implementation plans. With the guidance of standing committees, staff created plans cross-functional in nature, ensuring that cross-committee input drives implementation. The work plans also establish a process by which staff collaborate. The Executive Committee monitors the Board's progress and provides oversight in implementation.

The Board received quarterly reports via committees at the March, May, and August meetings. In November each year, the Board will receive an annual progress report. The purpose of this annual report is two-fold: to review the Board's accomplishments over the past year and to preview the year ahead.

Strategic Pillars and Priorities

Strategic Vision 2025 is organized by three pillars: *Inform, Innovate, and Engage*. Housed under the three pillars are eight strategic priorities. Since adoption of the Strategic Vision, staff have initiated work plans that reflect priorities led by each of the standing committees.

Just as the Board set forth on the path toward Strategic Vision implementation, the COVID-19 pandemic struck, closing schools across the country. The Board and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) turned its attention to the urgent set of decisions facing NAEP and whether it would be administered in 2021 as planned. Ultimately, the Board requested and received a Congressional waiver to postpone 2021 administration to 2022. On the heels of this decision, the Board was engaged heavily in revision of the NAEP Reading Framework, the first time the framework had been revised in nearly two decades. These two issues, alongside complications of the ongoing pandemic, took significant time for the Board and staff alike. However, noteworthy progress was made on other activities as described below.

Inform and Engage

Under the *Inform* and *Engage* pillars, the Board's vision prioritizes addressing the needs of stakeholders and increasing and improving their use of NAEP data. By enhancing the use and relevance of NAEP data, stakeholders can inform education policy and practice in ways that lead to improving student achievement.

The foundation for this work is an engagement strategy through communications and partnerships, that is, effectively communicating compelling stories with NAEP data to motivate stakeholders to take action.

The first step to engaging with NAEP stakeholders is building awareness of key findings from NAEP, such as the growing gulf between high- and low-performers over the last decade or the declines in NAEP reading and math scores nationally and in many states. Once awareness is developed, NAEP stakeholders can start gathering and evaluating data to understand factors potentially related to the findings on NAEP. From there, stakeholders and practitioners can share best practices that address those factors and eventually, hopefully, help solve the issues.

Year 1 Implementation

In Year 1, significant accomplishments in the engagement strategy included adopting new ways of conducting NAEP release events, collaboration with partners to further use of NAEP data and results, and highlighting areas of interest and opportunity for NAEP. Release events have traditionally been held in person but transitioned to the virtual space due to the pandemic. While driven by circumstances, the Board seized the moment to make events more inclusive and more attractive to participants. The virtual events also created an opportunity to showcase a wide range of partnerships.

Release Events. Near the end of October 2020, the Governing Board led a virtual release of the NAEP Grade 12 results in reading and mathematics. Chair Haley Barbour kicked off the release event, after which then-Commissioner of NCES Dr. Lynn Woodworth set the context for the grade 12 data. Next, Dr. Peggy Carr, then-Associate Commissioner of NCES, shared highlights from the data. During the second half of the event, Board members Alberto Carvalho (district superintendent representative), Paul Gasparini (secondary school principal representative), and Reginald McGregor (business representative) addressed questions from NAEP stakeholders in the education and business communities, including Siemens, Lumina, the Fordham Institute, and Education Trust-West. More than 500 attendees tuned into the live-streamed event. Following this release, the Board produced a series of graphics spotlighting the grade 12 data that elicited attention on the Board's social media channels, with focus on two- and four-year college application and acceptance rates, student confidence in reading and math skills, and performance of students with disabilities.

In November 2020, the Governing Board partnered with NCES, Education Trust and the Fordham Foundation for a well-attended Twitter chat. Participants discussed score and contextual data from the Grade 12 report, including reading and subgroup performance, as well as implications for policymakers and educators in such areas as course taking and college preparation.

In May 2021, the Governing Board hosted the release of the 2019 NAEP Science results. Nearly 600 attendees joined to hear then-Acting Commissioner Carr's presentation of the findings and a policy-focused conversation with Board member Christine Cunningham and Board alumnus Cary Sneider. The release event featured stakeholders in the science education community, fostering a network of NAEP-savvy experts within policy and advocacy groups, such as the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), and the National Association for Research in Science Teaching (NARST).

Next, in June, the Governing Board partnered with the questioners from the National Science Teachers Association featured at the May release event and Stephen Pruitt of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) for a popular Twitter chat. Activities like these solidify strong working partnerships with stakeholders in NAEP Science, which are particularly useful ahead of the Board's review of the NAEP Science Framework. Finally, to accompany the release event and the Twitter chat, the Board produced

videos about the subscales measured by the NAEP science assessment and graphics highlighting results. These circulated on the Board’s social media channels.

Just last month, the Board released the 2020 NAEP Long-Term Trend results for 9-year-olds and 13-year-olds. As these data measure very different skills from main NAEP with different populations (age-based vs. grade-based), the release itself assumed a different tone. Thus, the release took the form of a video, produced in close collaboration with NCES, which highlighted and explained results of most relevance. Media and policy advocates grasped the main findings readily, an important goal of the Board’s Reporting and Dissemination Committee (R&D) and disseminated the findings widely. Plans for follow-up activities are underway. In addition, 9-year-olds will participate in the 2022 NAEP Long-Term Trend, so next year’s release will lend invaluable insights into the impact of COVID on learning.

Collaboration. Beyond the stakeholder involvement that surrounded 2021 release events, the Board also partnered with the American Association of Geographers (AAG) to highlight NAEP Civics, NAEP U.S. History, and NAEP Geography data. Led by AAG’s Michael Solem, this NAEP symposium spotlighted solid research with these data as exemplars for new researchers to follow. Board staff and NCES staff presented at the symposium and assisted in its coordination.

Spotlights. Over the past year, the Board convened discussions and produced materials to reflect areas of need and interest. For instance, at its March 2021 quarterly meeting, Board members heard from three experts about considering equity within the context of assessment generally and NAEP specifically. Highlights from the Board’s discussion focused on urging educators to think beyond *what* factors in education work to *how* they work, on aligning interventions to school settings, and calling for additional data to capture students’ educational experiences more fully, with a focus on subgroups. This discussion was the first of what is anticipated to be a growing area of emphasis for the Board, particularly as discussions of equity in assessment increase among the testing and measurement community and beyond.

As an initial step in this direction, the Board published a full-length feature [Leveraging NAEP Data to Study and Improve Educational Equity](#), the first in a suite of multimedia products that will focus on equity. This feature tackles equity from a national perspective on how the education, research, advocacy and policy communities have used NAEP data to understand inequity in education and inform steps to improve equitable outcomes for students. The feature also includes perspectives from experts on how NAEP data from the 2022 administration will be critical in understanding the impact the pandemic has had on student achievement. Future installments will focus on equity efforts in several TUDA districts.

In nascent areas of interest, the Board developed a short [video](#) to explain the increasingly divergent trend lines in NAEP Reading and Mathematics results over a decade, an ongoing area of exploration for the Board. To date, the video has been viewed over 1900 times. As it is by far the most watched video the Board has produced, it suggests that interest is high as the Board takes up this body of work.

Finally, in response to immediate needs over the past year, the Board produced collateral that provided timely information to the public about the NAEP 2021 waiver and the NAEP Reading Framework.

Year 2 Implementation

In Year 2, the engagement strategy involves the use of communications and outreach as the “connective tissue” among the Board’s priorities. Drawing from committee and full board discussions over the past

year, as well as issues raised by stakeholders, preliminary planning at the staff level is focused on several key areas of interest. Those areas may include:

- Communicating 2022 NAEP reading and math results in relevant, useful, and actionable ways, particularly given nationwide concerns about students' learning loss during the pandemic;
- Examining the growing divide between NAEP's high- and low-performers and finding ways to effectively communicate this information and catalyze action among stakeholders;
- Exploring how to improve measurement and reporting of students who score below *NAEP Basic*;
- Participating actively in the measurement community's deliberations on how to create more equitable assessments;
- Identifying potential solutions toward a more accurate SES indicator in NAEP; and
- Making policy decisions that will inform and support NAEP's transition to its next generation digital platform.

These and other issues will be points of discussion in upcoming Board meetings. The Board will determine and prioritize the areas of emphasis, providing guidance to staff in responding to NAEP's high priority needs in 2022. It is anticipated that the Board's engagement strategy will require pruning, aiming for more depth in a few key areas and less breadth across a wide range of topics. The engagement strategy will be less about stand-alone events and activities and more about sustained efforts on key issues. Success in 2022 means making connections between the public's interests and NAEP, strengthening relationships with key stakeholder groups best positioned to use insights from NAEP to improve student achievement, and collaborating with NCES to provide robust, actionable information to the public.

Inform and Innovate

Under the *Inform* and *Innovate* pillars, the Board aims to optimize NAEP through the [Schedule of Assessments](#), achievement levels, and frameworks. The NAEP Assessment Schedule instantiates the Board's policy priorities of frequency, utility, and efficiency. Ensuring that policymakers share those priorities and support them via appropriate funding for NAEP is essential to implementing the Board's vision of assessments that cover a breadth of content areas, provide information frequently enough to allow for insights about student progress, and provide state-level results when possible.

Since the Board's inception, it has been committed to setting high expectations for the achievement of U.S. students and spearheaded the use of policy-driven achievement levels in educational assessment. The NAEP Achievement Levels are an essential feature of NAEP's reporting that communicate to the public expectations for student achievement—and have inspired improvements in states' own standards. Equally important, the Governing Board is responsible for determining the content and format of all NAEP assessments and has carried out this statutory responsibility by engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders in developing recommendations for the knowledge and skills NAEP should assess in various grades and subject areas. By updating frameworks, NAEP remains a relevant, useful resource to the public.

Year 1 Implementation

In Year 1, accomplishments include ongoing communication and meetings with policy stakeholders about the NAEP assessment schedule, launch of the achievement levels descriptors project in mathematics and reading, and framework updates.

Communication with Policymakers. One of the Board’s legislatively mandated responsibilities is to set the NAEP Assessment Schedule. In 2021, the Board communicated with the U.S. Secretary of Education and members of Congress about the Board’s commitment to administering the full assessment schedule, which is crucial to understanding what America’s students know and can do in various subjects. This action on behalf of the Board came about based on the projected funding flows through 2024, as presented by NCES at 2020 and 2021 quarterly Board meetings. On behalf of the Board, staff conducted meetings with Department of Education staff in the Secretary’s office, the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, and the Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs to express support for an increase to the NAEP budget to maintain the assessment schedule. Ultimately, President Biden’s fiscal year (FY) 2022 Budget Request for the U.S. Department of Education included a \$15 million increase to the NAEP program that would cover most costs associated with the projected budget deficit. In addition, the House Labor-HHS-Education 2022 appropriations bill included a \$40 million increase, which is \$25 million more than President Biden’s budget request. The additional \$25 million would be reserved to conduct a state-level Civics assessment in 2024. The FY 2022 appropriations process is still underway and, to date, no final bill has been passed by Congress and signed into law by President Biden.

Achievement Level Descriptors. In September 2020, the Board awarded a contract to Pearson to review and revise the NAEP Reading and Mathematics achievement level descriptions. This project is intended to provide validity evidence to address the most important recommendation from the 2016 evaluation of NAEP achievement levels. The project will also produce reporting achievement level descriptions to more clearly communicate what students within each achievement level can actually demonstrate on the assessment in accordance with the [Board policy on NAEP achievement level setting](#). Recent activities include a virtual pilot study meeting conducted on October 25-29, 2021, which will inform the operational study planned for February 21-25, 2022 (also to be held virtually).

Frameworks. Since 2018, the Board has been actively engaged in the process to update NAEP Frameworks. Three key activities took place in this area during the last year. First, the Board unanimously approved the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment Framework in August 2021. Then, in November 2021, the Board will take action on the 2026 Reading Framework Item and Specifications, an accompanying document designed to provide guidance to NCES and its contractors in operationalizing the assessment.

Next, with the recent updates to the frameworks in mathematics and reading—after a decade-long period of not updating existing frameworks—earlier this year the Board initiated review and revision of the [framework development policy](#) and procedures. The Assessment Development Committee (ADC) held a joint meeting with the Committee on Standards, Design, and Methodology (COSDAM) to discuss the current framework process and, as part of a continuous improvement effort, consider potential revisions to the process. ADC will bring to the Board in November 2021 a set of recommendations for Board input and discussion.

Related, in fall 2021, ADC introduced a new activity to kick off review of the NAEP Science Framework, conducting an initial public comment period to collect input from the field on the state and relevance of the [existing NAEP Science Framework](#). In November, the Board will review feedback received from this public comment. The initial public comment is intended to help the Board identify the key issues for which the Board may want to provide policy guidance to Science Framework panels (if the Board decides to update the framework) and to identify what additional input and expertise is needed to inform that policy guidance so that white papers can be commissioned and/or expert panels can be convened in early 2022.

Year 2 Implementation

Looking ahead to Year 2, the Board will continue to monitor and manage the NAEP assessment schedule in robust ways, link NAEP to external data sources, enhance framework update processes and procedures, and effectively communicate NAEP achievement levels with external audiences. Further, the Board will turn its attention to exploring NAEP's next generation of digitally-based assessments and improving NAEP's measurement and reporting of lower-performing students.

In 2022, the Board will continue to coordinate efforts with NCES to ensure the NAEP program has the necessary funding to administer the assessment schedule and conduct research and development to modernize the program. Board staff will work with congressional committee staff and other policymakers to communicate funding needs and any changes being considered to the assessment schedule. Additionally, staff will support the Board in establishing the policy priorities and understanding policy implications of NAEP's transition to the next generation of digitally-based assessments.

The Board will make strides in linking NAEP to external data sources by convening a working group of Board members from COSDAM and R&D. In conjunction with NCES, the group will identify policy-relevant findings from existing linking studies and recommend how this work can be highlighted in ways that are actionable to policymakers. Simultaneously, through a contract the staff will begin cataloguing data already linked to NAEP and disseminating this information to stakeholders and partners, developing a plan for increasing linkages, determining which additional linkages to take on, and getting underway conducting the necessary studies to do so.

Guided by the Board's [Achievement Levels Work Plan](#), studies to review ALDs in other subject areas are planned following the completion of the studies focusing on reading and mathematics. Advisory groups will convene to provide recommendations on communicating NAEP achievement levels and, in collaboration with R&D, an interpretive guide for the NAEP achievement levels will be produced. In addition, the Board will explore ways to improve measurement and reporting of students who fall below the NAEP Basic achievement level.

Finally, the Board will continue making progress in the framework update arena, through policy review and revision, a schedule for updates that aligns with the NAEP Assessment Schedule through 2030, and proceeding with revisions to the NAEP Science Framework, as determined by ADC and the Board.

Conclusion

Strategic Vision 2025 was crafted to frame the Board's work over a four-year period. The aims are lofty, but necessary. On behalf of America's students and in service of NAEP the Board must prioritize what information to share and how to share it (inform), build bridges with stakeholders in communicating NAEP's relevance and value (engage), and serve as the touchstone for the policies that drive the future of large-scale assessment (innovate). In doing so, the Governing Board will continue to ensure from its policy position that NAEP remains the "gold standard" assessment of educational achievement in the United States.