



State Perspectives on Opportunities for NAEP to Innovate

In March 2022, the Governing Board began to discuss opportunities for innovation within NAEP, guided by a presentation from NCES Commissioner Peggy Carr and Governing Board Executive Director Lesley Muldoon. At that meeting, Board members explored potential ways to strengthen the assessments' relevance and utility for key stakeholders. Board members requested more information on “use cases” for NAEP data by policymakers, in particular—i.e., how states can and/or should use NAEP assessment data to inform policy and practice in their communities.

This document summarizes previous research and interviews with states conducted by Board staff and supplements the perspectives that will be shared by state education leaders during a panel discussion on Thursday, May 12th from 11:30 am – 1:30 pm ET.

Panel Discussion at May 2022 Board Meeting

The following state leaders will serve as panelists (see Attachment A for biographies):

- Kirsten Baesler, Superintendent of Public Instruction, North Dakota
- Angélica Infante Green, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Rhode Island
- Darin Nielsen, Assistant Superintendent of Student Learning, Utah State Board of Education
- Michael Sibley, Director of Communications, Alabama State Department of Education
- Allison Timberlake, Deputy Superintendent of Assessment and Accountability, Georgia Department of Education

In advance of the meeting, panelists received questions to consider in their remarks to the Governing Board, including:

- How has your state used NAEP data to understand student achievement and/or progress? To inform decisions about resource allocation, policy priorities, or other education priorities?
- What has been most useful/helpful about NAEP data to your state in the past?
- What limitations or challenges have minimized the utility of NAEP data?
- Who are the most important stakeholders in your state to help understand/use NAEP data?
- What steps could the Governing Board take to increase the likelihood of other education leaders and policymakers in your state using the data to support improved outcomes for students—such as the Governor’s office, state legislators, and district superintendents? What do they need to understand and communicate the 2022 results?

- How can the Governing Board and NCES best move NAEP into the future coming out of COVID and ensure that NAEP remains as relevant and useful as possible for state education leaders and policymakers?
- What other advice or suggestions do you have for the Governing Board and NAEP?

Prior Research and Interviews

Overview of 2019 Research on Uses of NAEP

In 2019, the Governing Board studied uses of NAEP data by policymakers, researchers, media, and the public and found they used NAEP scale scores, achievement levels, and contextual data in several ways.

- **Education researchers**, for example, tended to use the NAEP results more frequently for drawing state comparisons, studying relationships across indicators of performance, and examining how performance relates to contextual variables.
- **State policymakers** used NAEP data to compare their results to other districts, states, and the nation; make within-state subgroup comparisons; analyze state achievement trends; suggest changes to state assessments; inform levels of student performance; validate state standards; and inform education policy and resource allocation.
- **Government agencies** used NAEP results to understand student performance and make decisions about which policies to implement.
- **Journalists** covered results of main NAEP reports and, if available, focused on state and urban-district level data based on their audiences.

The analysis also examined how NAEP was misinterpreted or used incorrectly, especially in media coverage, with some reporters describing *NAEP Proficient* as being “on grade level”, for example, or making causal attributions or inferences about the results. More information about this [analysis](#) is available in the COSDAM materials from March 2019.

State and District Overviews

In addition, the Governing Board has produced a series of narratives that profile states and districts participating in the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA). These profiles spotlight how state and district leaders use NAEP data and frameworks to inform policy development and implementation, which the leaders consider as critical to improving performance on NAEP and state and local assessments. Summary findings from these narratives follow.

Oklahoma: In 2016, Oklahoma Superintendent of Public Instruction Joy Hofmeister oversaw an effort to write and adopt new academic standards for grades K-12 in English language arts and mathematics that would align to NAEP. Hofmeister saw NAEP as a baseline to make sure state standards were nationally and globally competitive, and the state’s education department also used NAEP frameworks in that effort. Through community meetings and public comment periods, the state included thousands of Oklahomans in the process of writing the new standards, including stakeholders from higher education, business leaders, parents and families, and subject-matter experts. The state also proactively approached media and gave district leaders resources for families to explain how the new standards would initially affect state test results.

Aligning the state's standards effort paid off as seen in the most recent NCES report "Mapping State Proficiencies Standards Onto NAEP Scales" that shows where each state's performance standards fall on the NAEP scale and in relation to the NAEP achievement levels. In reading and math at grades 4 and 8, Oklahoma's NAEP equivalent score was below the *NAEP Basic* range in 2007. As of 2019, all NAEP equivalent scores were in the *NAEP Proficient* or *NAEP Basic* range.

Wyoming: The state launched a new state assessment in 2018 employing NAEP data and assessment frameworks in the development process. State leaders saw NAEP as both a reliable and steady measure and a way to emphasize the rigor they wanted to have on their own tests. The updated assessments were aligned to other efforts, including new, more demanding academic standards; professional learning communities for educators' professional development; a focus on early elementary literacy and numeracy; and an equitable funding model. Former Superintendent of Public Instruction Jillian Balow had explained at one point, "We don't make policy decisions without thinking about NAEP."

Arizona: In 2010, the Arizona Department of Education shifted to a more rigorous set of standards for English language arts and mathematics, and those who led the revision of these standards sought to align them with the NAEP frameworks. The new standards set expectations for students at the end of each grade level, which emphasized comprehension and critical thinking with the goal of preparing students for college and careers. Between 2009 and 2017, in fact, Arizona was among the top 10 jurisdictions with the largest score gains for students in reading and math at grades 4 and 8. State leaders credit Arizona's improving scores on NAEP over the years with helping to build momentum to continue reform efforts.

Mississippi: The Magnolia State has become a leader in education and has seen student achievement gains thanks to a range of efforts, including higher academic standards; a coordinated, statewide focus on improving literacy; and greater professional support for teachers. State leaders have used NAEP to measure progress and identify areas for growth along the way. The Mississippi Department of Education revised the state assessment in 2015, after changing the standards for what students are expected to know in various subjects at each grade level. When writing the new assessment, the Mississippi Department of Education looked at NAEP frameworks to ensure that the new state assessment mirrored expectations on The Nation's Report Card. Mississippi was one of only two states in 2019 to see average score increases for students in reading on NAEP, which followed its designation as one of the top leaders in score improvement in fourth grade reading between 2005 and 2017. And Mississippi was one of only four states that improved on average in all four grade/subject combinations from 2009-2019 (grades 4 and 8 mathematics and reading).

Tennessee: From 2011 to 2015, Tennessee became the fastest-improving state on the NAEP reading and mathematics assessments, with students marking more growth over that time than students in any other state at that time. Differences by race/ethnicity also decreased during this time. For example, the proportion of Black students scoring at or above *NAEP Proficient* in fourth-grade math increased by 13 percent, compared with 12 percent for white students. Many observers said that success came in part from comparing NAEP data to the state's own data. Seeing the gulf between the results of the two assessments galvanized leaders to make changes in policy and practice to improve systems for students and student outcomes. Efforts included making learning standards more rigorous; aligning standards with post-secondary demands; requiring students to take courses based on the state's more rigorous

standards; and checking that assessments measure whether students have met the standards. Several state leaders directly credited NAEP with helping them to identify where we need to do more work to help students achieve success.

Chicago: The city was one of the six original districts to join the TUDA program in 2002. The district embraces research and data to guide decisions as a central piece of its improvement efforts. In a partnership that was the first of its kind among large districts, the district and the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research collaborated closely to collect, track, and analyze education data as well as identify and share solutions. NAEP data allowed Chicago to compare itself to other TUDA districts.

Chicago student performance improved to resemble that of students in other large urban districts assessed in TUDA. Scores in grade 4 math and reading improved faster than the nation as a whole from 2009-2019. And from 2007 to 2019, the percentage of grade 8 students who scored at or above *NAEP Proficient* in math more than doubled.

District of Columbia: The district, where nearly 8 out of 10 students are considered economically-disadvantaged, has made great strides on NAEP over the last decade. Education leaders point to NAEP and the TUDA program as critical tools in their improvement efforts. As the school district has undergone significant policy and demographic changes in the last decade, they have relied on NAEP as a trusted gauge of student performance. Leaders have studied the district's results on NAEP and compared them to performance in similar TUDA districts to inform such efforts as expanding early childhood education and adopting high-quality curricula and assessments.

The district's math and reading scores on NAEP in grades 4 and 8 increased by double digits in the last decade pre-pandemic (2009-2019). Moreover, among students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, the district significantly increased student achievement in three of the four grades and subjects over that time. In the process, the score gap between the district and the nation narrowed significantly.

State Perspectives on Opportunities for NAEP to Innovate Speaker Biographies



Kirsten Baesler, Superintendent of Public Instruction, North Dakota

Kirsten Baesler is the state school superintendent and administrator of the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. The superintendent and her 86-person team oversee the education of almost 122,000 students in more than 450 buildings across the state. She was first [elected](#) in November 2012. She was [re-elected](#) to her third four-year term in November 2020, receiving 59 percent of the vote.

Superintendent Baesler is committed to working with families to provide each child with what they need to reach their highest levels of success. She has made preparing students for life after graduation a top priority. She works to ensure all students graduate Choice Ready with

the knowledge, skills, and disposition to do whatever they choose after high school, whether to attend college or university, go into the workforce, or enlist in military service.

She is an advocate for developing young people as citizens, with respect, courage, compassion, integrity, a sense of responsibility, and appreciation of the unique nature of America.

Superintendent Baesler is the president-elect of the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#), representing state education organizations across the nation. She will take office as president in November 2022. CCSSO provides leadership, technical assistance, and advocacy on major educational issues. The superintendent was first elected to the national board in January 2019.

Before taking office in January 2013, Superintendent Baesler had a 24-year career in the [Bismarck Public School system](#)—the state’s largest school district—as a vice principal, library media specialist, classroom teacher, and instructional assistant. Superintendent Baesler also spent nine years as an elected member of the [Mandan School Board](#), serving as the board’s president for seven of those nine years. She worked for a time as assistant director of the [North Dakota School Boards Association](#).

The superintendent holds two associates’ degrees from [Bismarck State College](#), a bachelor’s degree in education from [Minot State University](#), and a master’s degree in library and information technology integration from [Valley City State University](#). She has completed [Harvard University’s](#) graduate school educational leadership program. She has earned Valley City State University’s [Distinguished Alumni Award](#) and the [Rising Star Award](#) from Bismarck State College.

Superintendent Baesler is a native of Flasher, ND. She lives in Mandan, ND, and has three adult sons. Her sons are all graduates of North Dakota public schools and North Dakota University System institutions, and all have returned to North Dakota to work and make their homes. She enjoys spending time with them and her 92-year-old father, a retired rural mail carrier and Korean War veteran.



Angélica Infante Green, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Rhode Island

Angélica Infante-Green has served as the Rhode Island Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education since April 29, 2019. As Commissioner, she instituted several major efforts to improve K-12 education across the state, most notably a comprehensive review of the Providence Public School District. She is now leading the state intervention in the city’s schools to overcome decades of neglect and poor performance. In the midst of the pandemic, the Commissioner convened the Learning, Equity & Accelerated Pathways (LEAP) Task Force, which released its report and recommendations in April of 2021 to help guide accelerated learning opportunities to rebuild Rhode Island’s educational system post-pandemic.

Prior to joining RIDE, she served as the Deputy Commissioner of the New York State Education Department’s Office of Instructional Support. Infante-Green began her career as a bilingual classroom teacher in the South Bronx. Since leaving the classroom, she has served in a variety of roles focused on improving instruction for all students, particularly multi-lingual learners. She held several leadership positions for the New York City School Department, and she was a member of the first cohort of the Chiefs for Change Future Chiefs program.

As a first-generation American, Infante-Green sees her first day as a teacher as a life-changing moment where she realized her personal calling. Having herself learned English in school, and as the parent of a child with special needs, she has fought to replace a “deficit” view with an “enrichment” view for students who need more. Infante-Green earned an M.A. in Education and in School Administration & Supervision from Mercy College. She is married with a son and daughter.



Darin Nielsen, Assistant Superintendent of Student Learning, Utah State Board of Education

Darin Nielsen began his career in education as a school counselor at Teton High School after graduating with a Master of Science degree from Utah State University in 1995. The following year, he started a 22-year professional relationship with Box Elder School District where he fulfilled assignments as a school counselor, elementary principal, CTE/secondary curriculum specialist, director of technology, assessment/ professional development director, curriculum director, and assistant superintendent.

During his time with Box Elder School District, he earned additional educational credentials, including an administrative/supervisory certificate from Utah State University and the following endorsements, level I Reading, English as a Second Language (ESL), and Career & Technical Education (CTE).

In October 2017, he was hired as the Assistant Superintendent of Student Learning by the Utah State Board of Education. Since joining the Utah State Board of Education, he has overseen the adoption of two new state assessment systems, the development of a strategic assessment plan, is leading efforts to redesign Utah’s school accountability system, and development of the Utah Consolidated Improvement Planning tool, in addition to his leadership responsibilities with the Utah State Board of Education’s Assessment & Accountability, Career & Technical Education and the Teaching & Learning teams.



Michael Sibley, Director of Communications, Alabama State Department of Education

As Director of Communications for the Alabama Department of Education, Michael Sibley leads the team responsible for communicating education policies, programs and events with state and national news media, as well as internal and external publics and other education advocacy groups. He is the Chair of the State Policy Task Force to the National Assessment Governing Board.

Prior to joining the State Department of Education, Michael served as Director of Publications in Tuskegee University’s Public Relations and Marketing department. His responsibilities included overseeing and coordinating the development of internal and external communications, managing costs for an efficient publications schedule and cultivating marketing tactics to increase interest and enrollment at Tuskegee University.

Before accepting the position at Tuskegee University, he worked as Director of Communication for Guilford Capital Corporation—an investment banking firm in Montgomery, AL. There, Michael was responsible for the design and development of all company marketing material, the creation, purchasing and placement of advertisements in trade publications, as well as industry press releases and quarterly/annual investor reports.

Michael began his career in Communications and Public Relations as the Director of Public Relations for Troy University where his responsibilities included being a media liaison and spokesperson for Troy University as well as editor, writer and layout/ designer for the Troy University System Magazine. Michael accepted the position at Troy University after serving as a news reporter for *The Messenger*, a daily newspaper in Troy, AL.

Michael earned a Bachelor’s degree in Journalism and Public Relations from Troy University; a Master’s degree in Management from Troy University Montgomery; and a Doctorate in Education Leadership, Policy, and Law from Alabama State University.

Michael is a member of Kappa Alpha Psi, Fraternity and a founding member of Unity United Church of Christ in Montgomery where he serves as President of the Board of Trustees. He has been with Unity, under the leadership of Pastor Bennie Liggins for the past 12 years. He lives in Montgomery, AL, is married to Jameshia (Mimi) Sibley and has three daughters—Bria, Lauren, and London.



Allison Timberlake, Deputy Superintendent of Assessment and Accountability, Georgia Department of Education

Allison Timberlake has served in various capacities at the Georgia Department of Education over the last 10 years. Since 2018, she has been the Deputy Superintendent of Assessment and Accountability, responsible for overseeing, planning, and directing the development, implementation, and analysis of Georgia’s K-12 assessment and accountability systems. She led the redesign of the state’s K-12 assessments to leverage technology, reduce testing time, and increase the amount of information available on student learning. She also led the development of a statewide system of formative assessment resources for educators throughout Georgia.

Prior to her current role, she served as the Director of Accountability and Program Manager for Growth Models within the Georgia DOE and as Director of Educator Evaluation Systems for the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. From 2005 to 2011, she held several roles at the Southern Regional Education Board focused on research, assessment, and evaluation.

Allison holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in public policy from the Georgia Institute of Technology and a Ph.D. in research, measurement and statistics from Georgia State University.