National Assessment Governing Board

Guidelines for the Initial Release of *The Nation's Report Card*™

The following guidelines are provided as an addendum to Governing Board reporting policy principles for the initial public release of *The Nation's Report Card*™ results. Developed to offer additional direction for the content and organization of the initial release of NAEP results in print and on the World Wide Web, these guidelines were adopted by the Governing Board with the understanding that the design and structure of NAEP initial release reports should be steered primarily by the important stories found within the data gathered.

A. Printed Reports

Purpose

The Nation's Report Card™ shall be designed as a highlights report for an audience of the interested general public, providing a picture of both current student achievement in America and, as appropriate, trends in performance over time. In addition, it will present details of achievement by state and school district (when collected for public reporting in conjunction with specific NAEP programs) and by specific student subgroups, selected contextual factors, information about what NAEP is and why the study is conducted, and background information about the assessment design and methodology.

Overall Structure and Approach

1. *The Nation's Report Card* will be organized with an Executive Summary section with key findings up front, followed by presentations of each category of findings. Those categories include national, state and district, when collected, and student subgroup results by achievement level, scale score, and percentile distribution.
2. The Executive Summary should be limited to two pages or less, presenting the most important and newsworthy findings in text and graphic form.

3. Brief descriptions of achievement levels, scale scores, and percentile distributions should accompany the initial presentation of those respective results, providing basic understanding of the types of scores to the average reader. More detailed descriptions of these reporting areas will be found later in the report.

Navigation

1. The navigation model—how information is accessed within the document— must be clear and consistently applied, while providing for the most used forms of navigation.

2. A categorical table of contents should be provided to help readers move quickly through the document. This should be organized in useful categories for users. These may include, for example:
   - Executive summary
   - National results
   - State results
   - Grade-level results
   - Subgroup results
   - Sample questions and how they relate to achievement levels
   - Contextual variables and subject-specific background information
   - NAEP history and methodology
   - Frequently asked questions (FAQs)
   - Detailed national-state data tables

3. Some users may want to move quickly between the charts and graphs to understand the information. A consistent structure will facilitate such activity.

4. *The Nation's Report Card* should incorporate visual and editorial signs that confirm where the reader is within the document. This includes the obvious such as page numbers but can also feature color-coding, section labels, and a common layout to information design within a page.

5. As appropriate, summary information provided in the report should point readers to the Web site—www.nationsreportcard.gov—or additional resources for more information.

Information Design

1. Navigational aids and information will be placed consistently to serve as confirming labels and to orient users to the document.

2. Each reporting section should include an initial explanation of the type of information the section provides.

3. Background information (on NAEP history, methodology, sampling) and technical explanations shall be kept to the necessary minimum, and presented in consistent ways throughout the report—as secondary information to key findings and critical section definitions.

4. Charts, figures, and tables will be prominently featured, and legend information will be attached or in close proximity to the graphic.

5. The major charts and tables in the summary sections of the document will feature a common labeling system denoting common information. The goal is to make it easy for users to browse graphics and quickly understand the focus of each.

6. The report may feature "key findings" sections offering some explanation of the data. This will help users learn how to "read" the data available.

Presentation of Results

1. Each category of results should include (1) a description of the type of results presented; (2) a summary of key findings; and (3) one-to-two data graphics with a "quick read" guide to aid understanding of the chart, figure, or table.

2. As needed, the introductory description will explain why collecting and presenting data for each particular category is important.

3. Data graphics should provide a clear summary or depict meaningful improvements, declines, and/or gaps.

4. Efforts should be made to minimize repetition of technical explanations, such as the use of accommodations or the definition of statistically significant.

5. Reports will not include lengthy footnotes, technical definitions, and extensive background information. These elements are discouraged in the key data sections to keep the presentation of key results simple and clear.

6. Reports should highlight information important to the audience, e.g., meaningful changes, gaps, and influencing conditions, when available and reliable.

Presentation of Factors Related to Student Achievement

1. Reports may include contextual variables and Governing Board-approved subject-specific background information, approved by the Governing Board, to improve public understanding of results. The reports may present patterns and trends of these variables known to have an independent relationship to academic achievement without including NAEP achievement data in the charts and text.

2. Contextual variables may be included, consistent with report space and operational limitations. Readers may be directed to the Web site for more information.

Presentation of Sample Questions to Illustrate Achievement Levels

1. An explanation of NAEP achievement levels will be illustrated by released sample questions and answers to help readers understand expected performance.

2. Multiple choice and constructed response questions will be included to show the range of methods used to measure student achievement.

3. An explanation of content strands should be included, where appropriate, to further illustrate how NAEP measures curricular areas and content at specific achievement levels.

4. The sample questions section should show, but not necessarily be limited to, *Basic* and *Proficient* performance.

Presentation of Data Tables

1. NAEP data tables that include, when collected, national, state, district, and student subgroup results by achievement levels, average scores, and percentile distribution shall be made available to the public at the time of release.

2. NAEP data tables will contain clear and simple titles and legends, keeping technical definitions and footnotes to a minimum.

Additional Design Considerations

1. *The Nation's Report Card* will be designed and printed on standard 8½ x 11 inch paper for ease of filing and reproduction.

2. The length of the report should be determined by consideration of content essential to public understanding of the results. Every effort shall be made to keep page length to a minimum, with the expectation that access to all reportable data will be made available through the initial release Web site at the time of release.

3. *The Nation's Report Card* may utilize 4-color process in design and layout. If full color is used in the report, text and graphics should be designed to take advantage of this tool.

4. While designed in color, every effort should be made to prepare charts, figures, tables, and other graphics that will reproduce well as black and white photocopies.

5. While a specific color may be used to denote a specific NAEP subject (Mathematics, Reading, Science, etc.), the consistent application of a color palette shall be used to aide comprehension of data and navigation through the report.

B. Web Site for Initial Release

Purpose

All reportable NAEP results shall be accessible through an initial release Web site, providing a simplified linear progression through the data. The Web site shall be designed to accommodate a general audience that may have limited expertise with technology. Similar to printed materials, the Web site will present (1) a summary of student performance in the most recent assessment, (2) a look at how results are changing over time, (3) details of achievement overall and by student subgroups, (4) information about what NAEP is and why it is conducted, and (5) background information about the assessment design and methodology. In addition, the Web site will offer hyperlinks between related or supporting information.

Site URL and Metadata

1. The initial release Web site is an easy-to-remember URL— http://nationsreportcard.gov. The data should also be found on the NAEP section of the NCES Web site.

2. Descriptive metadata[*] should be used for each page of the Web site to aid in searching and to allow search engines that use metadata to more easily index the site for inclusion in search results.

3. Page names should reflect the content and purpose of the page.

Navigation

1. A clear set of options for primary navigation will be developed and remain as a consistent element throughout the initial release Web site.
   Suggested primary navigation for the site may include:
   - Report Cards (At a glance, Mathematics 2003, Reading 2003, Other)
   - State Profiles (50 states, plus other jurisdictions)
   - Methodology (sampling, report questions, testing methodology)
   - Parents Information Center
   - Researchers Information Center
   - Educators Information Center
   - Media Room
   - Resources (downloadable reports, charts and graphs)
   - About NAEP
   - Create a Report (Link to data tool and the ability to create your own report by entering a list of parameters and getting data results for these parameters – i.e., which report, state, gender, grade, year, etc.)
   - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

2. Site utility links—including Site Map, Contact Us, Glossary, Link to NCES site, Link to NAEP site, and Link to Ed.gov site—should be displayed as utilities rather than primary navigation.

3. Navigational aides, such as a breadcrumb trail, should be provided to users so that their position on the Web site can be seen at a glance and a user can easily navigate to higher or lower level pages.

4. The Web site should include a linear browsing option to each report to allow users interested in viewing the information step-by-step to progress through a report in a predefined order.

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[*] *Metadata are keywords and descriptions that are often included in the programming code of Web pages to define the content available on the page and across the associated Web site. This content is frequently indexed by Web-based search engines, as well as used by other site analysis and searching software in order to define the content on a particular Web page and find pages through searching tools.

5. The Web site should include a clear table of contents and chapters to each report so a user can easily jump to any subsection of the results, progress linearly from that spot, or jump to another spot without losing the context of where they are in the report.

6. The Web site should utilize "Previous" and "Next" buttons so that users can quickly view a preceding page of the report to gain further context.

7. The Web site should feature supporting links and related information in the context of the report to provide an easy reference for users to gain further understanding of the reports. Some examples of features may include a glossary of terms, information on testing procedures, sample questions, or links to a different level of the same information being viewed (e.g., national, state, district).

8. All pages on the Web site should offer links to associated sponsoring Web sites such as http://nces.ed.gov, www.nagb.org, and www.ed.gov. However, these links should be provided in a central location and remain separated from primary and secondary navigation on the Web site.

Homepage

1. The Web site should use HTML instead of graphic text and remain static after the initial release period to aid in "searchability" for the Web site and improve listing on search engines.

2. The Web site should highlight the most commonly accessed information, such as:
   - Your State's Profile
   - Major Findings
   - Information for Teachers
   - Information for Parents
   - Information for Researchers
   - Printer-Friendly Reports

3. Callout feature boxes should be used to offer quick and easy links to the most common interested user groups, including parents, researchers, educators, and news media.

4. Highlights from the report and key findings may also be highlighted on the homepage with links to more detailed information.

5. A sign-up field or link to NCES' NewsFlash e-community or other e-communication tools may be provided.

Design and Layout

1. The Web site should be designed to ensure a consistently branded message with printed reports and other materials.

2. Pages with vast amounts of data presented in a long single page should be broken up into multiple pages with pagination as a potential solution to accommodate extensive content.

3. A clear headline should define each page of content and subheadings should be used to identify each subsequent area of content. Where images, graphics, and charts are used, they should fit contextually into the content of the page or be referenced separately at the end of a section.

4. All content should be laid out in a printable format. This requires a maximum design width of approximately 740 pixels in order for each page to fit on standard, letter size paper.

5. Heavy background colors and imagery should be avoided so that users can print pages easily without burning excess amounts of printer ink.

Accessibility

1. The Web site should be designed according to Section 508 guidelines for persons with disabilities.

2. The Web site should utilize a horizontal format for text for optimum enabling of screen reading software.

3. The Web site should use ALT tags for all images to aid screen readers in identifying the images.

4. Graphics should be avoided for primary or secondary navigation—insure all navigation is HTML text based.

5. Avoid the use or overuse of dropdown navigation.

6. Offer a text-only version of all reports available for download alongside the PDF print version.

7. Pages should be designed for a minimum standard 800 x 600 screen with minimal graphics to improve download times for users without high-speed Internet connections. Avoid large graphic files to minimize loading time for the user.

8. Offer a text-based description in the ALT text (or LONGDESC text if necessary) and also in any text-based versions of PDFs for all charts and graphs.

Web Site Promotion

1. The Web site should be promoted through media relations to encourage members of the news media to visit the Web site for authoritative data on the nation's schools and the current state of K–12 education in America.

2. Developers should optimize the site for keywords-relevant searches.

3. NAEP should approach other Web sites with similar content to encourage linking and driving traffic to *The Nation's Report Card* Web site.

4. NAEP should engage organizations that work with teachers to inform teachers nationwide about the Web site and data available.

5. NAEP should investigate placing a paid online promotion campaign to encourage visitors to the Web site and downloads of the printed reports.

6. NAEP should coordinate Web site promotion with the release of new and upcoming reports.