



Final Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on  
Measures of Postsecondary Preparedness

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## **Acknowledgments:**

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## REPORT

The National Assessment Governing Board (Governing Board) has a long history of anticipating changing expectations in education and the corresponding need for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—also known as The Nation’s Report Card—to reflect those shifts.

Over a decade ago the Governing Board endeavored to report on academic preparedness for postsecondary opportunities, using NAEP’s grade 12 Reading and Mathematics assessments. Beginning with the 2013 NAEP results, the Governing Board reported that 37 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders were academically prepared to take entry-level, credit-bearing college coursework without remediation, providing the nation with a national metric of academic preparedness. However, the Governing Board’s efforts to explore an analogous metric linking NAEP to career readiness in specific job training programs were not supported by research. The Governing Board persists in its effort to identify additional postsecondary preparedness indicators.

In November 2016, the Governing Board unanimously approved its [Strategic Vision](#) to focus the Board’s work through the year 2020. Included within that vision is the priority to, *“Develop new approaches to measure the complex skills required for transition to postsecondary education and career.”* In August 2017, the Governing Board established the Ad Hoc Committee on Measures of Postsecondary Preparedness (committee) to review existing research, collect expert testimony, and prepare recommendations for the Governing Board’s consideration. Over the course of a year, between November 2017 and November 2018, the committee met quarterly and commissioned several research papers and convened five expert panel meetings in various regions of the country. The summaries of these are included in the appendix. This report is the culmination of the committee’s work.

From its inception, the committee approached its charge with an inclusive definition of “postsecondary,” recognizing the value of identifying skills that all youth need, regardless of the pathways they take immediately after high school. While the nation increasingly values “college and career ready” standards, there is no comprehensive measure to represent readiness for any pathway they may pursue. Instead, states typically either rely on academic measures presuming that they also indicate career readiness, or bifurcated indicators for college *or* career readiness. There is much more variation in career readiness measures, which are not as robust as long-established academic measures. However, the expectations for high school graduates are shifting, creating a greater need for indicators beyond those traditionally used to indicate postsecondary preparedness more broadly.

As the agency established by the United States Congress to set policy for The Nation's Report Card, the committee believes it is the Governing Board's responsibility, in partnership with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), and other stakeholders, to identify thoughtful and meaningful approaches to providing the American public with measures that indicate if America’s youth are prepared for their lives following high school.

A breakthrough in new measures of postsecondary preparedness, inclusive of both college and career readiness, will not arise from developing a new large-scale assessment. Rather, the committee supports utilizing existing measures wherever possible within NAEP, NCES, and beyond to provide a fuller and more dynamic picture of the various skills and abilities that constitute postsecondary preparedness. By law, NAEP must remain a low-stakes assessment with generalized results and is prohibited from gathering data in a way that could generate individual school or student scores. These requirements are designed to protect NAEP results against misuse and enable the Governing Board to explore the development of new approaches to measure and report on postsecondary preparedness. Therefore:

**The Ad Hoc Committee on Measures of Postsecondary Preparedness recommends that the National Assessment Governing Board work in partnership with the National Center for Education Statistics to provide the public with a *Postsecondary Preparedness Dashboard* consisting of and displaying indicators from a variety of data sources (including but not limited to NAEP) to report, to the extent possible given the limits of the existing data and the NAEP Authorization Act, the academic knowledge, literacies, cross-cutting cognitive skills, and intra- and inter-personal skills that are essential abilities for all students graduating high school to be prepared for postsecondary endeavors.**

To produce such a dashboard, the committee recommends the Governing Board and NCES develop a prototype to ascertain if a Postsecondary Preparedness Dashboard is feasible and potentially valuable to stakeholders. The committee recommends the following exploratory steps prior to a Board decision on whether or not to publish the Postsecondary Preparedness Dashboard.

The Governing Board will:

- **Create a conceptual framework** describing the universal skills that represent postsecondary preparedness; The goals of this would be to:
  - *Be comprehensive* in the skills, knowledge, and abilities included in the framework, to include constructs that may extend beyond NAEP's statutory purview and/or be unlikely to be measured in large scale assessments.
  - *Include external input* in the development of the conceptual framework, as is done with all NAEP frameworks.
  - *Provide the education field with a resource*, offering the full picture of what postsecondary preparedness includes, even if it is not expressly taught in secondary school or measured in assessments.
  - *Inform revisions to NAEP*, as new frameworks, items, and contextual variables are developed, relevant aspects of the postsecondary preparedness conceptual framework can be incorporated into those revisions.

NCES will lead the effort to:

- **Document existing NCES measures and conduct a gap analysis** to identify which constructs in the conceptual framework can be fully or partially fulfilled with existing NAEP and NCES data sources, and where new measures are needed;
- **Develop a prototype of a Postsecondary Preparedness Dashboard**, utilizing the conceptual framework and populated with existing results from NAEP (including contextual variables and transcript studies data) and other NCES data sources (including TIMSS, PISA, PIRLS, and PIAAC);
- **Propose an approach to develop new NAEP postsecondary preparedness indicators** for the Governing Board’s consideration alongside the prototype dashboard. The goals for this approach would be to:
  - *Adhere to NAEP’s statutory mandate* to report on academic progress and related contextual information, recognizing that certain critical postsecondary skills may not be best measured through a large scale assessment generally or by NAEP specifically.
  - *Avoid testing burden* by piloting and operationalizing any new postsecondary preparedness measures during the NAEP grade 12 assessment window.
  - *Rely on informational and descriptive metrics in the absence of predictive results*, recognizing that developing benchmarks using a standard setting process may not be appropriate or desired for many of the measures.
  - *Utilize an iterative approach to populate the dashboard* so it can evolve to include stronger claims and evidence, as NAEP defines and refines the indicators over time.

Following the aforementioned exploratory phase, the committee believes the Governing Board would have sufficient information to determine if it can provide information regarding postsecondary preparedness that policymakers, educators, researchers, and practitioners will value as they look to the Governing Board to provide answers about what US students know and can do. The committee expresses a sense of urgency for this work and encourages the exploratory phase to be completed within one year.

Education must develop youth who are lifelong learners able to work with technology to achieve their life goals and aspirations. Creativity, problem-solving, and adaptability are necessary skills for youth to develop in addition to the content knowledge which remains critical for deeper learning, even in the era of Google and smart phones. Building this range of academic knowledge, intra- and inter-personal skills, and competencies is critical for all youth; therefore it is incumbent on schools to teach them and for NAEP to report on progress achieving them, to the extent possible. Despite the resounding public interest in measures of postsecondary readiness (of the underlying skills needed for both college *and* careers), one does not yet exist.