

National Assessment Governing Board

Reporting and Dissemination Committee

Report of May 15, 2015

Reporting and Dissemination Committee Members: Andrés Alonso (Chair), Rebecca Gagnon (Vice Chair), Anitere Flores, Tonya Matthews, Tonya Miles, Ronnie Musgrove, Father Joseph O’Keefe.

Governing Board Staff: Stephaan Harris, Laura LoGerfo, Anthony White. Incoming Executive Director: Bill Bushaw.

NCES Staff: James Deaton, Holly Spurlock.

U.S. Department of Education Staff: Jagir Patel.

Other Attendees: AIR: Cadelle Hempill. CCSSO: Michael Muenks. CRP: Edward Wofford. ETS: Jonas Bertling, Amy Dresher. Hager Sharp: David Hoff, Debra Silimeo. HumRRO: Steve Sellman. Optimal Solutions: Brian Cramer. Reingold: Amy Buckley. Westat: Chris Averett.

1. Core Contextual Variables Review

Andrés Alonso called the meeting to order at 10:20 a.m. and welcomed Reporting and Dissemination (R&D) Committee members to his penultimate R&D meeting. He noted how the outreach event the previous night showed how the field perceives and experiences NAEP. The role and task of R&D is to engage the field and inform that perception.

The Committee immediately delved into reviewing NAEP core contextual items. Mr. Alonso asked Mr. Jonas Bertling of ETS, the lead developer of the core contextual variables, to explain where R&D finds itself in the review process for the core contextual questionnaire. R&D must approve the slate of core contextual variables for the 2016 pilot test for the 2017 operational assessment. R&D can make no substantive changes to items, though R&D can suggest items to drop or add from a list of pretested questions.

These pretested questions can be taken from previous rounds of NAEP, from cognitive labs, and from any national survey as long as the target populations match, i.e., same age or grade from the United States. Holly Spurlock of NCES explained that any decision-making about dropping items must consider first whether the items are so problematic that the R&D Committee does not even wish to pilot the item again to procure more data on its clarity and performance. Mr. Bertling explained that there are multiple versions of the same variable included in the review package so that results from the pilot test can point to which item version

is best (e.g., clearest, free of bias, not potentially sensitive) and thus deserves space on the operational assessment. Based on recommendations from the R&D deliberations, NCES must submit the slate of items for the pilot test to the Office of Management and Budget by late June.

Digital Technology Questions. R&D Committee member Tonya Miles kicked off the discussion by asking Mr. Bertling if the core questionnaire includes items about students' exposure to digital technology, their first age of exposure to digital technology, and the extent of their experience with digital technology. Mr. Bertling explained that there are two sub-items under the socioeconomic status category on student access to tablets, computers, and Internet access, but no items on duration of digital technology exposure or experience.

Mr. Bertling added that a special study focused on computer access and familiarity was conducted, but the data from that study have not yet been analyzed. Depending on how those items performed, the best of those items may be included in this questionnaire. Committee members noted that such questions about students' familiarity with digital technology will provide critical context as NAEP digital-based assessment (DBA) results are released. Future rounds of NAEP questionnaires should include items on students' extent of technology (e.g., software, hardware, Internet) exposure and experience.

Household Questions. Generally, R&D Committee members wondered why their previous feedback on some of these core contextual questions was not integrated or addressed. Comments on specific questions elicited agreement from the entire Committee, namely the definition of parent should be expanded to reflect non-traditional family structure. With so many different and complex options for caregivers across households in America, limiting questions about occupation and education to only mother and father may confuse participants and capture inaccurate information. Committee members recommended that the questionnaire seek input from the child to define the primary caregiver in the home.

The agility in programming provided by the DBA approach should permit responses to this family structure question to populate subsequent questions about those adults' education and occupation to keep the language consistent and the names or roles familiar to students. NAEP should be able to link these item responses and subsequent questions if not in 2017, then in 2019.

NCES dropped from the proposed pilot an item that sought participants' free response to the question "how would you describe each of the adults that live in your home? You can write things like, for example, 'Dad', 'Mom', or 'Grandma'." This was eliminated due to confusion among respondents; some students interpreted the item to require a response describing their caregiver as nice or tall, not delineating their relationship. In addition, asking about the number of people in the household struck some respondents and their parents as too intrusive, perhaps as an attempt to ferret out illegal housing conditions. But the number of working adults in the home serves as a rough proxy for wealthy home environment, so it seems critical to include. The Committee recommended that this question be reinstated and tested in the pilot.

Tenure Questions. The Committee then turned to an item on the school administrator survey, which asks, "Does your school offer tenure to teachers?" A companion question to this school

administrator question is asked of teachers, “Have you been awarded tenure by the school where you currently teach?” Mr. Alonso explained that, in his experience, schools do not offer tenure, but districts do. Ms. Miles suggested that administrators may interpret the item figuratively, meaning that if their district provides tenure, then they may respond affirmatively for their school. But some of the respondents who replied “no” may have taken the question literally. Thus the phrasing of this question may baffle respondents and as such, elicit erroneous information. Mr. Bertling reported that this item was not flagged for showing extreme results in the cognitive lab but is not significantly associated with NAEP scores.

In sum, variability in the interpretation of the item’s meaning across respondents yields inconsistent, inaccurate results that have little bearing or substantive meaning. The high proportion of affirmative responses suggests that respondents did misinterpret the question and consequently provided an incorrect answer. The meaning of the question struck the Committee members as so unclear, especially for such a complex issue, that NCES should find an alternate item that has been pretested with the appropriate target respondents, especially an item that includes the word district (though district does not work in the private school sector, perhaps “district or diocese” would be more appropriate phrasing). Unfortunately adding “district or diocese” to the question requires pretesting by NAEP or by a similar national survey.

Mobility Question. The Committee next examined the question posed to school administrators about the percentage of 12th graders in the school who are new to the school. To capture mobility appropriately and accurately, the questionnaire must solicit data on the number of 9th graders relative to the number of 12th graders. But the questionnaire as it stands does not include measures to calculate graduation rate and mobility. By asking only about 12th graders, the survey ignores the critical issue of dropouts, which most frequently occurs in the 9th and 10th grades. Thus, what information do these items provide about the student and/or the school they attend? Mr. Musgrove noted that perhaps this item intends to tap whether the school is a sufficient draw for students, attracting seniors transferring into the school. The Committee did not recommend any action on this question, but several members agreed that there is limited utility and value to this question for its intended purpose.

Outstanding Questions and Overall Remarks

Father Joseph O’Keefe asked if and how the core contextual items account for differences in developmental ages and stages among the student respondents. No immediate reply was given.

Several Committee members inquired to Mr. Bertling and Ms. Spurlock about the perceived intrusiveness of the contextual questions. Ms. Spurlock responded that actually asking the number of people in the household is perceived as far more intrusive and thus problematic than the phrasing or approach of a question (i.e., multiple choice or constructed response).

The Committee’s discussion focused on an essential, critically important question: Can the core contextual questions accurately describe modern households while retaining the basis for international comparisons and maintaining trend? How can the household structure, education, and occupation variables change to evolve with the changing nature of society?

Despite the conversation’s focus on a few problematic items, in general the majority of core contextual items are “spot-on”. Specific items received praise for their potential value, such as how many adults live in the household and who they are, and merit inclusion based on their centrality to questions about student and school background and NAEP scores. Additionally, Committee members agreed that knowledge generated from these questions should be actionable. Findings about parent occupation provide no means for schools to improve. What NAEP chooses to measure limits or expands the scope of potential action.

Next Steps

The R&D Committee recommends that NCES and ETS find more inclusive questions to measure family structure, parent occupation, and parent education effectively. If such questions exist and have been pretested with the appropriate target populations, then these items should be used in the pilot. If the search for alternate items is futile, NCES should include the original item in the pilot. If its performance is weak or poor in the pilot, then R&D may recommend dropping it from the operational questionnaire.

It is understood that these more inclusive items may not exist by the time needed for the 2017 operational assessment. It is also understood that next May’s R&D Committee meeting will review how these specific items perform in the pilot, and the Committee may not approve questions for the 2017 operational assessment based on the findings from the pilot test. Thus, the subsequent planning for 2019 must include developing more accurate, more inclusive, and more appropriate family structure items and socioeconomic status (SES) items.

R&D members agreed to approve the proposed slate of core contextual items but stipulated that more inclusive and effective variables must be investigated thoroughly. The Committee also recommended that NCES should submit a memo to Laura LoGerfo updating R&D Committee members on the results of their research for better questions, and especially whether any preferred alternative items emerged. However, with that condition, the Committee agreed to approve this slate of contextual variables for the pilot test and submit it for approval to the full Board at the Saturday morning session.

ACTION: The Reporting and Dissemination Committee recommends approval of the core contextual variables, with specific changes to be communicated to NCES in writing.

2. Focused Reports: Reviewing and Prioritizing

Laura LoGerfo, the Assistant Director for Reporting and Analysis, introduced the next topic on the agenda, which is a follow-up to a conversation at the March R&D Committee meeting. The Board seeks to restart an agenda of policy-centric reports that extend the message of NAEP between main report releases. The Board will bid a contract later this year to create a vehicle for developing, producing, and releasing brief policy reports. The contract will be nimble enough to adapt to the Board’s needs. But it needs to be primed with an initial report, and then as topics compel further investigation, those subsequent reports can be launched under the same contract.

Ms. LoGerfo presented a list of ten ideas at the March meeting for the initial report, which the Committee discussed and narrowed down to four big ideas. Ms. LoGerfo came to the May meeting with two feasible topics from the four that could be good starts for such a contract:

(1) reports on regional highlights, showcasing patterns in achievement overall and by subgroup across states in specific regions that share similar issues; and (2) a look at NAEP in charter schools, non-charter public schools, and private schools. The May meeting of the Committee focused on prioritizing and approving the topics.

Charter, Non-Charter Public, Private Schools

Father O’Keefe opened the conversation, reporting that he had presented at the annual meeting of the National Catholic Education Association and received questions about what NAEP is and its importance. The audience also asked whether NAEP shows that private schools perform better than public schools. This audience’s expressed interest in NAEP results suggests that this second topic about achievement by sector may be valued by stakeholders. It is imperative that in an environment when data become highly politicized, NAGB should make a clear statement about what NAEP does and does not show.

Father O’Keefe then inquired about students who participate in schooling options that lie outside the charter, non-charter public, and private school groupings, such as home-schooled students, which now exceed the number of students in Catholic schools. Rebecca Gagnon agreed and asked under what category online charter schools fall.

In sum, these R&D Committee members cautioned against focusing this report or brief on “school choice” given the limited options such a report can cover. Moving forward, the report must make it very, very clear about what choice actually means and consider how to capture the complexity and nuance of choice within public school systems.

Regional Highlights

Rebecca Gagnon then discussed the proposed report highlighting practices common to high-performing districts and states by region. She noted that the presentation by Acting IES Director Sue Betka to the full Board that morning about the Regional Education Laboratories dovetailed nicely with the proposal to look at NAEP in regions. One compelling question in this topic might be differences in proficiency among states in regions. Andrés Alonso asked whether some valuable information may be lost from disaggregating the data by region. Perhaps by integrating the regional level within a report that focuses on the state level, the report may make a bigger impact than a report with only state-level highlights.

Overall Remarks

Tonya Matthews expressed the need for the Board to drive the story, control the narrative, and encourage analysts to use the data. The Board should not just respond and be defensive when other reports featuring NAEP data emerge. R&D should work on a strategy to make a persistent, cohesive impact with the data, an idea which aligns well with the strategic planning efforts of the whole Board. The reports should belong to a nimble contract that allows for one of these two reports as an initial product and lead to 2-3 page briefs focusing on contextual variable analyses by subgroup as those data become available. The reports would serve the Board and its mission well by sharing good news, highlighting surprising and intriguing trends

that typically elude the main releases, and setting models on how to use NAEP data for others to follow.

Though the Committee intended to discuss the media embargo policy next, a report released by the organization Achieve on the day before the Board meeting drew Committee members' attention. The report did not analyze or present NAEP findings accurately. Mr. Alonso expressed "mixed feelings" about the nature of the error. On the one hand, more analysts should use NAEP data. On the other hand, the inaccuracies should be addressed, thus should Acting Commissioner Carr make a public response about the technical quality of the report? The R&D Chair suggested Board staff ask Ms. Carr, because the Board communicates results but does not comment on reports, the latter of which is within NCES' purview. The entire Committee agreed that this issue merits more time for thoughtful discussion. They also repeated Tonya Matthews' previous call to move away from reaction to a more proactive strategy to reporting.

3. Media Embargo Policy

Stephaan Harris, Public Relations Specialist for the Board, suggested that the Committee needs to review and perhaps expand what qualifies as media under the Board's embargo policy. Mr. Alonso suggested that to ensure this topic receives appropriate and careful deliberation, the Committee should meet via teleconference in the next two months. The results of that conversation could lead to a draft resolution for action at the August Board meeting.

Mr. Alonso admitted that the media coverage of the Civics, Geography, and U.S. History reports disappointed him. The media missed the exciting story about subgroups' improvement. He noted that this again shows how the Board needs to drive the narrative more effectively.

Mr. Alonso adjourned the R&D Committee meeting at 12:35pm.

I certify the accuracy of these minutes.

Andrés Alonso

Chair of Reporting and Dissemination Committee

June 8, 2015 _____

Date