

The National Assessment Governing Board's Innovation Ambition for NAEP: Strategic Planning Initiative Overview

Purpose of the Strategic Planning Initiative

The purpose of the National Assessment Governing Board's Strategic Planning Initiative is to take stock of the value and contributions of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to our nation, identify opportunities to advance the Governing Board's statutory mandate, understand and address any threats to this mission posed by changes in the external environment, and ensure that the Governing Board continues to play an important role in informing policymakers, educators, and the public about student achievement in our nation.

The Strategic Plan should consider the current Federal budget environment and strive to reallocate and redeploy existing resources in alignment with the Framework's Strategic Priorities rather than presume appropriations increases. The Governing Board's Strategic Planning Initiative should concentrate on objectives that can be achieved by 2020.

As much as possible, the Governing Board's Strategic Plan should be consistent with the priorities of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in order to increase the synergy and impact of the plans to further the overall mission and objectives of NAEP.

The Strategic Plan should affirm the long-standing principles of NAEP's curriculum independence, its status as a low stakes assessment for national, state-level, and select urban district benchmarking comparisons and analysis, and its prohibition on reporting individual student and school results, all of which are in accordance with the NAEP statute.

Process

The work to develop and implement the Governing Board's Strategic Plan for NAEP will occur in three phases, over the course of approximately six years.

Phase I – Establish Overarching Goals and Strategic Priorities (Fiscal Year (FY) 2015)

Led by the Executive Committee, the Governing Board will develop the vision for its Strategic Plan, with the goal of finalizing the Strategic Planning Framework for action at the August 2015 quarterly meeting. Approval of the Strategic Planning Framework document will conclude Phase I of the NAEP Strategic Planning Initiative.

Phase II – Develop the Strategic Plan (FY 2016)

With the Overarching Goals and Strategic Priorities set forth in the Framework as its guide, the Governing Board will embark on the detailed work of creating its Strategic Plan. This will include determining what activities the Governing Board should initiate, gathering external feedback from stakeholders on the Strategic Plan, pursuing additional research to inform Governing Board decisions, and determining the methods the Governing Board will use to monitor the implementation and success of the Strategic Planning Initiative. Phase II will begin in the fall of 2015 and is expected to be completed by August 2016.

To develop an appropriate Strategic Plan and ensure that it serves as the “North Star” for the Governing Board’s innovation ambition, the Board should consider its vast expertise and experience, which provides the foundation for this effort. While much of the Governing Board’s current efforts will dovetail with the goals and priorities identified in the Strategic Planning Framework, the Board should also reflect on whether certain activities should be modified to preserve resources for—and maintain focus on—the Governing Board’s priorities. For example:

- The Governing Board has invested a significant amount of resources into academic preparedness research. What should the future investment in this area be, in light of the Governing Board’s Strategic Priorities?
- The Strategic Planning Framework contemplates further work in the realm of assessment literacy. How would this priority build from the Board’s short term Assessment Literacy campaign into long term actions for the Board’s Standing Committees?
- Several potential priorities consider innovating through new communications approaches. How might this impact the current work of the Reporting and Dissemination Committee and its already approved Communications Plan?
- The Framework considers messaging strategies that target parents. How would this future work build from the Governing Board’s 2014 Parent Summit?
- The Future of NAEP initiative recommended the creation of an Innovations Laboratory to define and drive an agenda for innovation. NCES adopted this recommendation and is investing in research and development to improve NAEP. How will the Governing Board and NCES work in partnership to ensure that the NCES investments in innovation are aligned with the Governing Board’s strategic vision?
- Research Roadmap – The potential priorities and proposed related activities in the Strategic Planning Framework may require additional information before the Governing Board will be able to determine whether or how to implement them. The Governing Board should identify the “research roadmap” of desired short-term and long-term information needs to support the Strategic Planning Initiative.

Phase III – Implement the Strategic Plan (FY 2017 – 2020)

Once the Governing Board approves the Strategic Plan, the Board will embark on the implementation phase to occur over an approximately four-year period. The initiatives identified within the Strategic Plan will primarily be conducted by the existing Standing Committees. The Executive Committee will provide leadership to the Committees regarding the course of those activities and will monitor the plan’s implementation. At each August Governing Board meeting while the Strategic Plan is in effect, the Board will assess attainment of its Strategic Priorities and Overarching Goals.

Proposed Timeline:

Phase	Dates	Activities
Phase I	February 8-9, 2015	Executive Committee discusses strategic planning process and priorities
	March 5-7, 2015 <i>(Board meeting)</i>	Executive Committee discusses draft Strategic Planning Framework Full Board discusses Strategic Priorities
	May 14-16, 2015 <i>(Board meeting)</i>	Executive Committee discusses process and timeline Full Board discusses draft Strategic Planning Framework
	August 6-8, 2015 <i>(Board meeting)</i>	Full Board Action on Strategic Planning Framework
Phase II	Fall 2015 – Summer 2016	Identify and implement action steps to fulfill the Board’s approved Strategic Planning Framework Obtain input from partners (e.g. NCES) and stakeholders on the draft Strategic Plan Begin identifying and implementing “research roadmap” needs to inform Governing Board decisions and activities
	May 12-14, 2016 <i>(Board meeting)</i>	Full Board discusses draft Strategic Plan
	August 4-6, 2016 <i>(Board meeting)</i>	Full Board Action on Strategic Plan
Phase III	Annually in August 2017 – 2020 <i>(Board meetings)</i>	Check-up on attainment of Strategic Priorities and Overarching Goals for the duration of the Strategic Plan’s implementation



The National Assessment Governing Board’s Innovation Ambition for NAEP: Strategic Planning Framework

Purpose of the Strategic Planning Framework

The National Assessment Governing Board embarked on its Strategic Planning Initiative to ensure that the Governing Board continues to play an important and strategic role in furthering student achievement in our nation. This Strategic Planning Framework captures the Governing Board’s vision for the National Assessment Educational Progress (NAEP) program, and identifies the Overarching Goals and Strategic Priorities that the Governing Board will use to develop and implement the Strategic Plan.

Our Mission

The mission of the independent, bipartisan National Assessment Governing Board is to set policy for NAEP. As specified in its authorizing statute, the Governing Board must identify the subjects to be tested by NAEP, determine the content for each assessment, review all NAEP questions, set achievement levels, and inform Congress and the American Public about the achievement of U.S. students. To fulfill its Congressional mandate, the Governing Board must also “take appropriate actions needed to improve the form, content, use, and reporting of results of any assessment authorized”.¹

Legacy of Innovation

The Governing Board identifies assessment-related issues in public education which can be addressed by NAEP, sets policies for NAEP which are forward-thinking and innovative in relation to NAEP’s potential role and impact on U.S. student achievement, and collaborates with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to implement the Board’s policies. Examples of the Governing Board’s successes include:

- Identifying important broad-based curriculum areas for the NAEP assessments (NAEP has always been about more than reading and mathematics and includes a wide range of subjects, for example, Technology and Engineering Literacy (TEL) and Economics);
- Encouraging development of innovative assessment items and assessment methodology (i.e., digital-based assessments (DBA));
- Effectively communicating NAEP results in ways that enable parents, educators, and policy makers to take action (such as by reporting results via achievement levels, making reports accessible and easy to understand, and increasing outreach to parents); and

¹ Pub. L. 107-279, §302(e)(1)(I),

- Focusing on important issues for U.S. education (including linking NAEP to international assessments, conducting research on academic preparedness for college, and expanding increased assessment literacy of NAEP stakeholders).

Power of Partnership

The Governing Board works closely with NCES to implement the NAEP program and benefits from ideas generated from their efforts. A recent NCES initiative on The Future of NAEP² will be informative to the Board’s strategic planning efforts.

The Future of NAEP initiative started in 2012 when NCES convened panels of experts and state and local stakeholders to develop a high-level vision for the future of the NAEP program, as well as a plan for moving toward that vision. The resulting recommendations to the Commissioner of NCES were published in the May 2012 *NAEP Looking Ahead: Leading Assessment into the Future* white paper; it defined what NAEP does best as:

“Going forward, we expect that NAEP will continue to serve as the most authoritative source of information concerning patterns and trends in the academic achievement of American youth, and also as a model of excellence and innovation in large-scale assessment. It will continue to serve as a trustworthy, low-stakes benchmark test against which to judge the effectiveness of various large-scale educational reforms. It will also evolve to measure an expanded range of learning outcomes using new technologies.” (p.7)³

Role of the Governing Board and NAEP

An essential role of the Governing Board is to safeguard public trust in NAEP’s evaluation of our nation’s elementary and secondary students’ academic performance. The Board sets policy to enable NAEP to provide the long view of educational progress—spanning five decades—with breadth and depth of coverage across subjects and content. NAEP provides our country with information to understand the strengths, weaknesses, and trends in our decentralized system of education. Whenever there is debate about student achievement, NAEP is relied upon as a trusted and trustworthy source of information.

² “The Future of NAEP” initiative, National Center for Education Statistics, https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/future_of_naep.aspx.

³ “The Future of NAEP” white paper, National Center for Education Statistics, https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/Future_of_NAEP_Panel_White_Paper.pdf

National Assessment Governing Board: Legacy of Innovations

While the vast majority of NAEP's innovations have been developed through the collaborative efforts of the Governing Board and NCES, it is worth noting the unique role that the independent policy-setting Governing Board can play in keeping NAEP at the forefront of assessments. The Governing Board's legacy of innovations includes:

- ✓ Developing assessment frameworks aimed at deeper learning;
- ✓ Establishing achievement levels (policy adopted in 1990);
- ✓ Promoting the use of contextual information about students, teachers, and schools as it relates to student achievement;
- ✓ Emphasizing subject areas of importance to the U.S. (e.g., Civics, U.S. History, TEL, the Arts);
- ✓ Exploring the use of NAEP as an indicator of students' academic preparedness for college;
- ✓ Supporting the transition from paper-based to digital-based assessments (DBA):
 - Phase I* – Science interactive computer tasks, Writing, TEL 2009-2014; and
 - Phase II* – Reading and Mathematics, etc. DBA for 2017 and beyond; and
- ✓ Highlighting the importance of reporting on comparative data involving NAEP and international assessments.

While much attention is focused on NAEP as the gold standard, equally important is NAEP's innovation over time under NCES's technical direction. The Governing Board successfully balances the tension inherent within the dual goals of maintaining NAEP's role as the most trusted source of academic achievement of the nation's students over time while also continuously improving the form and function of NAEP to remain relevant. From its inception, NAEP innovated on all aspects of assessment. Examples of these innovations include:

- *Technical* – developing sampling methodology; developing new types of assessment questions and tasks; generating analytic models; setting achievement levels; applying item response theory; scale anchoring; developing constructed-response test questions; targeting complex skills and hands-on tasks; delivering digital-based test questions; and pioneering scenario-based interactive assessment tasks.
- *Content* – measuring knowledge and skills of youth as a group; measuring learning progress over time; developing new assessment frameworks and path-breaking instruments; collecting and analyzing contextual data; and increasing the inclusion of individuals with disabilities and English Language learner populations.
- *Communications* – reporting on student learning in terms of specific grades; increasing the accessibility and usability of information through internet-based reporting and dissemination, which places control in the hands of the user; and focusing on more useful reporting on comparison groups and with all participating jurisdictions.

Thinking About the Future Success of NAEP – Key Questions, Risks, and Opportunities

The Governing Board is uniquely positioned with an authoritative voice in the national conversations surrounding assessment. To fulfill its mission as an independent and unbiased leader in the evolving educational landscape, the Governing Board must consider several key questions and national trends identified below as it develops its strategic plan.

What are the major trends in education that could shape NAEP, and, in turn, how can the Governing Board contribute to some of those trends and best respond to others?

How do we balance the roles of NAEP serving as both a mainstay of education as well as a catalyst for improvement?

What is the innovation ambition for NAEP that will ensure NAEP remains relevant for future generations?

What are the leadership roles the Governing Board can and should play?

The *NAEP Looking Ahead* white paper lists “four major trends to which NAEP must be prepared to respond”:

1. Other assessments are likely to provide information about student achievement that may be aggregated and compared across districts and states. NAEP’s value as an independent, ongoing, nationally representative assessment will remain and may, in fact, be more important than ever;
2. As we aspire to provide all of our young people with the high levels of knowledge and skills needed in a global economy, NAEP will be called upon to assess a broader set of learning outcomes;
3. Rapidly changing technology is driving all aspects of modern life, including learning and assessment. NAEP should continue to serve as a leader in assessment innovation as new technologies become available for assessment (e.g. adaptive testing), as well as for scoring and reporting results; and
4. There is increasing interest in cross-national comparisons of educational achievement, and in sharing data and instructional resources across states and perhaps even across nations. Linking assessments and data-sharing can offer more context to help understand and interpret NAEP findings.

In addition, the Governing Board should consider the following themes in national conversations surrounding education and assessment:

5. The nature and use of assessment:
What is the role of assessment to improve the quality of teaching and learning?
What is the appropriate role for the Governing Board to play in this dialogue?

6. Data privacy:

What are the concerns about data privacy surrounding assessment generally, and is there a need for NAEP to respond to those concerns?

What public concerns about student privacy within NAEP might be raised by new reporting and communications initiatives if, for example, the Governing Board increases public attention on NAEP contextual variables or promotes an assessment literacy initiative for parents, students, and policymakers?

7. The state of the Common Core State Standards and anti-testing sentiments (overlaps with #1):

What is the relationship between NAEP and the Common Core State Standards? How can the Governing Board leverage its unique position to add perspective on the importance of NAEP and high quality assessments in the era of anti-testing sentiment?

8. The relationship of NAEP to international assessments (overlaps with #4):

What is the relationship of NAEP to international assessments (e.g. Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS))?

Amidst this period of change and uncertainty, the Governing Board has the unique opportunity to contribute to the national conversation on assessments, but also to shape that conversation; and in doing so, help to ensure that NAEP remains relevant and adds value to the national dialogue on education.

Overarching Goals for the Governing Board's Future Work

The Governing Board has identified the following tenets to ensure its Congressional mandate serves as the foundation of the Strategic Planning Initiative. These Overarching Goals represent the values that the Governing Board will uphold throughout the development and implementation of its Strategic Plan.

- ✓ *Keep NAEP a Trusted Brand* – Protect the reputation of the Governing Board and NAEP as the gold standard for assessments.
- ✓ *Be a Good Steward of NAEP's Assets* – Sustain the important Governing Board work of protecting data trends, state and Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) data, and linkages with international assessments and administrative data.
- ✓ *Assess a Broad Range of Subjects* – Ensure that the assessment schedule includes a diverse set of subjects supported by dynamic frameworks, for example, U.S. History, Civics, Science, Writing, Economics, TEL, the Arts, etc., NAEP extends beyond reading and mathematics.
- ✓ *Continue Innovating for NAEP* – Assess innovative content areas, for example TEL. Advance item, task, and test design and implementation utilizing technology.
- ✓ *Improve Collaboration with NCES* – Align and partner with NCES to provide the vital leadership and resources needed to protect the future of NAEP.

- ✓ *Be a Voice in the National Conversation Surrounding Education and Assessment* – Use NAEP results to provoke public conversations about education and equitable outcomes. For example, what is literacy in a digital world? How can the Governing Board focus on the urgency of closing achievement gaps? What is the value of assessment?
- ✓ *Engage Key Constituencies Especially Parents, Educators, and Policy Makers* – Increase communications to key constituencies, including parents and advocacy groups, to better understand, leverage, and support both NAEP and high quality assessments more generally.

Strategic Priorities

The Governing Board will achieve its Overarching Goals through the Strategic Priorities, which will be central to the Board’s Strategic Planning Initiative. The Strategic Priorities are not to be considered ancillary or “add-ons” to NAEP activities. Instead, these priorities will guide the Congressionally-mandated work of the Board. They are grouped below by their primary purpose; however, these priorities are interrelated and accomplishing any one priority would contribute to the success of others. The specific activities undertaken by the Governing Board to achieve the four below-listed Strategic Priorities will be determined in Phase II and implemented in Phase III of the Strategic Planning Initiative. The Strategic Priorities are:

- 1. *Develop Messaging Strategies to Improve Understanding of NAEP within the Context of High-Quality Assessments Generally***
 - a. Advance New Reporting Strategies*
 - b. Utilize Effective Communication Tools*
 - c. Increase Meaningful Parent Engagement*
 - d. Implement an Assessment Literacy Campaign*
- 2. *Increase Efficiencies to Effectively Use NAEP Funds***
- 3. *Innovate Assessment Design to Keep NAEP on the Forefront of Measuring Student Achievement***
- 4. *Strengthen External Partnerships to Promote and Support the Resources NAEP Offers***

Conclusion

The Governing Board will develop its Strategic Plan by considering the key questions and national trends as they apply to the Overarching Goals and Strategic Priorities described above. When designed and implemented, the Strategic Plan will ensure that the Governing Board continues to play an important role in informing policymakers, educators, and the public about student achievement in our nation.

The imperative for school improvement called for by the 1983 report, *A Nation At Risk*, that carried through the bi-partisan legislation of the *No Child Left Behind Act* is giving way to the emergence of a new era of education improvement efforts reflecting the demands for increased academic rigor, technological sophistication, civic participation, and global perspectives that define the early decades of the twenty-first century. The Governing Board accepts the challenge to prepare students for their future, not our past, and to use assessments to inform the Board’s progress to deliver on this commitment.