

A. Summary Background of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

For over 30 years, information on what American students know and can do has been generated by the Nation's Report Card, formally mandated by Congress as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP is a continuing, national survey of the knowledge and skill of young Americans in major learning areas taught in school. It is the first ongoing effort to obtain comprehensive and dependable achievement data on a national basis in a uniform, scientific manner. The purpose of NAEP is to gather information that will aid educators, legislators, and others in improving the education experience of youth in our country. Its primary goals are to measure the current status of the educational attainments of young Americans and to report changes and long-term trends in those attainments. Other goals include disseminating information about assessment methods and materials and assisting those who wish to apply them at local, state, and national levels.

The planning and development of NAEP began in 1964 with the appointment by the Carnegie Foundation of the Exploratory Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education. The specific tasks assigned to the Exploratory Committee included the development and testing of an all-inclusive methodology to assess the knowledge and skills of groups of America's young people rather than of individuals. With support from both the Fund for the Advancement of Education and the Ford Foundation, the committee completed the developmental phase of the project in late 1968.

NAEP has always been a unique cooperative undertaking of the education community and the Federal Government. The program is directed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education. Since 1983, NCES has contracted with the Educational Testing Service (ETS) for the design, analysis, and reporting of NAEP data and with Westat for sampling and data collection activities. Since 1989, National Computer Systems (NCS) has been the materials distribution and processing subcontractor.

The National Assessment Governing Board, made up of representatives of state and local education associations and the business community, makes policy decisions and provides overall direction to the program. The Board is responsible for selecting the subject areas to be assessed, including adding to those specified by Congress; identifying appropriate achievement goals; developing assessment objectives; developing test specifications; designing the assessment methodology; developing guidelines and standards for data analysis and reporting; and developing standards and procedures for interstate, regional, and national comparisons.

Each learning area assessment is the product of several years of work by many educators, scholars, and laypersons from across the Nation. Working in committee, these groups propose general goals that they feel Americans should achieve during the course of their education. These goals are reviewed and discussed until a consensus is reached on objectives for each subject area. The objectives are then given to exercise (question) writers to create measurement instruments appropriate to the objectives. When the exercises have passed extensive review by subject matter specialists, measurement experts, and laypersons, they are compiled into booklets to be administered to national probability samples of young people.

While the primary purpose of the Nation's Report Card is to document patterns and trends in student achievement, the project also informs educational policymakers by collecting descriptive background information from students, teachers, and school administrators. The authorizing legislation for NAEP dictates a careful and extensive process of background questionnaire design and development. This legislation states that the purpose of NAEP is not "to authorize the collection or reporting of information on student attitudes or beliefs or on other matters that are not germane to the acquisition and analysis of information about academic achievement." The law further provides that no data shall be collected "that are not directly related to the appraisal of educational performance, achievements, and traditional demographic reporting variables, or to the fair and accurate presentation of such information."

NAEP's procedures guarantee the anonymity of participants, as no student names are recorded on the assessment booklets nor removed from the schools. Further, national assessment results are reported on the national level and by region of the country, not for districts, schools, or individual students. Only group statistics are reported and they are broken down by gender, race/ethnicity, and a host of variables that illuminate students' instructional experiences.

B. The State Assessment Program

NAEP traditionally reported only on information for the Nation as a whole and for geographic regions of the country. Many people maintained that more detailed information would assist efforts to improve American education. Because states have the primary responsibility for public education, state-level data was seen as being particularly useful.

In April 1988, Congress responded to these concerns by adding to the national assessment a new component: the trial state assessment. Under this component, states could volunteer to participate in the program and would assume responsibility for administering the assessments within the state. Trial state assessments were conducted in 1990, 1992, and 1994 and were

evaluated thoroughly. Beginning with the 1996 assessment, the authorizing statute no longer considered the state component “trial.”

The grades and subjects assessed in the state assessment are a subset of those in the national assessment. After the assessments, states exercise the option to compare the knowledge and skills of their students with students in other states and in the Nation. States can also monitor their own progress over time in the selected subject areas. The program began in 1990 with eighth-grade mathematics and expanded to include eighth-grade mathematics and fourth-grade reading and mathematics in 1992. The following table shows the subjects assessed at each grade since 1990.

	Grade 4	Grade 8
1990	—	Mathematics
1992	Reading and Mathematics	Mathematics
1994	Reading	—
1996	Mathematics	Mathematics and Science
1998	Reading	Reading and Writing
2000	Mathematics and Science	Mathematics and Science

In each state volunteering to participate, the state assessment involves the following:

- ★ A sample of about 100-115 public schools per grade;
- ★ A sample of about 30 students per subject, per school, to yield approximately 2,500 students assessed in each grade and subject;
- ★ Assessments held during February with schools spread evenly throughout this 4-week period;
- ★ Assessments conducted by state/local staff trained in assessment procedures by NAEP; and
- ★ A subsample of the assessment sessions observed by NAEP staff.

C. Role of the Assessment Administrator

The assessment administrator is a school/district staff member who is responsible for all assessment activities in one or more school(s). These activities are listed on page 5 and each task is described in detail in the sections that follow. The assessment administrator should not be the students' teacher for the subjects being assessed. Therefore, the students' mathematics teacher may not administer the mathematics session and the students' science teacher may not administer the science session.

A checklist of tasks for assessment administrators has been provided in Appendix A of this manual. It can be removed for your convenience.

The Assessment Administrator's Tasks

Preparing for the Assessment	Conducting the Assessment	Concluding the Assessment
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attend the in-person training. 2. Obtain the schedule for the assessment from the state coordinator (including the assessment date and the number of sessions in the school). 3. Arrange for assistance on the day of the assessment (optional). 4. Make arrangements for the assessment sessions. 5. Receive the Administration Schedules from the state coordinator (listing the students to be assessed). 6. Receive and secure the assessment booklets and materials from NAEP. 7. Verify materials received and request additional materials, if necessary. 8. Select a sample of newly enrolled students. 9. Review and update the Administration Schedules and identify students who cannot be assessed. 10. Distribute assessment questionnaires to appropriate school staff and collect them before the day of the assessment. 11. Make appropriate arrangements for any SD¹ or LEP² student(s) requiring an accommodation. Complete the top of the Administration Schedule. 12. Prepare for booklet distribution. 13. Notify teachers and students about the assessments and ensure that students attend the appropriate sessions. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare the room. 2. Prepare the booklets for the assessment. 3. Administer each session. 4. Supervise each session. 5. Conclude each session. 6. Protect the security of the assessment booklets and materials. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Record the results of the session on the Administration Schedules. 2. Code the booklet covers. 3. Prepare assessment materials for shipping. 4. Pack assessment materials and give them to the NAEP representative, if present, or ship them according to instructions. 5. Schedule and conduct a makeup session, if necessary. 6. Ship materials. 7. Be prepared to discuss the session with the NAEP representative either in person or by telephone. 8. Retain the school's copies of the Administration Schedules and Roster of Questionnaires.

¹ SD is defined as a student with a disability.

²LEP is defined as a student with limited English proficiency.

