

Commissioner's Statement

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) gathers and publishes information on the status and progress of education in the United States. The congressional authorization for these activities (with antecedents to 1867) states that the purpose of the Center is to collect and report "...statistics and information showing the condition and progress of education in the United States and other nations in order to promote and accelerate the improvement of American education"—Section 402(b) of the National Education Statistics Act of 1994 (20 U.S.C. 9001). This law also mandates an annual statistical report on the subject from the Commissioner of Education Statistics. This 1999 edition of *The Condition of Education* responds to the requirements of that law.

Interest in education data and indicators:

Federal, state, and local policymakers require a variety of information to develop, implement, and monitor policies designed to improve education. Education and business organizations, as well as community groups and citizens, generally want to know how to make and support efforts designed to bring about that improvement. Informed decisions cannot be made without valid information, however. As various groups voice their desires and concerns about our schools, NCES continually seeks to define efficient and effective measures that can meet the demand for timely, useful information, while maintaining high statistical standards. At the same time, the interest in data about new topics has not lessened the need for basic statistical information about educational institutions and trends.

Developing education indicators in one way the Center has participated in widening national discussion about the types of measures needed to serve these diverse purposes. *The Condition of Education* is an indicator report, analyzing key data that measure the health of education, monitor important developments, and show trends in major aspects of education. Unlike most other statistics, an indicator is policy relevant and problem oriented; it usually incorporates a standard against which to judge progress or regression. Indicators cannot, however, identify causes or solutions and should not be used to draw conclusions without other evidence.

Organization of this report: The format of *The Condition of Education, 1999* differs from that of previous years in order to better communicate the contents of the publication to the reader as well as to identify areas in which more research and attention are needed in the field of education research. The *Condition* first presents an overview essay of the information that the reader will find in the individual indicators. The purpose of this essay is to create links between the numerous topics discussed in this publication and construct a comprehensive statistical picture of the condition of education. Following the overview essay are the indicators, with each one appearing on two facing pages: the first page presents statistical results and one or two tables with supporting data, while the second page presents one or more figures that illustrate the major findings of the indicator.

The indicators are organized into five sections: (1) Learner Outcomes; (2) Quality of Education Environments (Elementary/Secondary); (3) Quality of Education Environments (Postsecondary); (4) Social Support for Education; and (5) Educational Participation and Progress. Additional tables and supplemental notes that support the indicators follow the five indicator sections. For those interested in delving deeper into the supporting data, further supplemental tables are available on-line at the NCES Internet site at <http://www.nces.ed.gov>.

Indicator selection: Each year, about 60 indicators are carefully selected and presented in *The Condition of Education*. The indicators represent a consensus of professional judgement on the most significant national measure of the condition and progress of education at this time, but are tempered necessarily by the availability of current and valid information. The indicators presented here reflect a basic core that can be repeated with updated information on a yearly or cyclical bases, supplemented by a more limited set of indicators based on infrequent or special studies.

The indicators presented in this report were developed using data from various studies carried out by NCES, as well as surveys conducted elsewhere, both within and outside of the federal government. Although indicators may be simple statistics, more often they are analyses—examining relationships; showing relationships; showing

changes over time; comparing or contrasting subpopulations, regions, states, or countries; or studying characteristics of students from different backgrounds. New to the *Condition* this year are indicators with statistically adjusted data, such as *Indicator 25*, which presents data on the relationship between the age and level (elementary or secondary) of teachers and their salaries during a period of 28 years. These statistically adjusted indicators demonstrate complex relationships between several variables.

This year's edition contains 22 new indicators, which are integrated throughout the report. In the Learner Outcomes section there are new indicators on reading and arts proficiency, citizenship skills, and educational outcomes and employment status after college graduation. In the Quality of Educational Environments section on Elementary and Secondary Education, there are several new indicators on the instructional methods used by teachers, the mainstreaming of students with disabilities, and teacher characteristics. In the companion section on the Quality of Educational Environments in Postsecondary Education, there is a new indicator on distance education. The Social Support for Learning section contains new indicators about father's involvement, family characteristics of students, and trends in student financing of higher education. The final section, Educational Participation and Progress, has a new indicator on racial and ethnic isolation in school and several new indicators focusing on the progress of students through higher education.

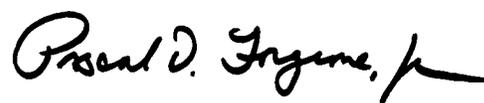
The utility of *The Condition of Education* should increase as more diverse, high quality data become available, especially as new time series data can be constructed. For example, in early 1999, new data on Internet access in public schools were released in a report from the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS).

Data on early childhood education will greatly expand with the start of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, which will follow a sample of children from kindergarten through the 5th-grade, which began in 1998. Plans are also under way for the next wave of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF), and National Adult Literacy Survey. In addition, the next round of secondary and postsecondary longitudinal studies will enable us to update what we have learned from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88),

the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS), and the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (B&B). New data from each of these studies will help us better understand the educational experience in our Nation's schools and colleges.

Availability of NCES data and information: We strive to make our products available in a variety of formats and in language that is appropriate to our diverse audiences. All new NCES publications and many data sets are available on-line through the NCES Internet site at <http://www.nces.ed.gov>. I hope you find this medium a useful way to access our data. In addition, the National Education Data Resource Center (NEDRC) performs special statistical analyses and tabulations of NCES data sets. NEDRC services are free of charge for state education personnel, education researchers, and others requesting special tabulations. In addition, NCES publications can be obtained at no cost from ED Pubs. To contact ED Pubs, call their toll-free phone number: 1-877-4ED-PUBS (877-433-7827), TTY/TDD: 877-576-7734 or e-mail them at EDPubOrders@aspensys.com or send them a written request at ED Pubs, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, Md 20794-1398.

I hope that you find the material in this document useful and invite you to send us comments on how we can improve future editions of this report.



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