



## Commissioner of Education John Eaton

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*Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year (1875)*

*When the work of collecting educational statistics was begun by the Office, it was found that there was no authentic list of the colleges in the United States, or of academies, or normal schools, or schools of science, law, or medicine, or of any other class of educational institutions.*

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# An NCES History

Statistics paint a portrait of our Nation. Since 1870, the federal government has collected statistics on the condition and progress of American education. In the beginning, data were collected on basic items, such as public elementary and secondary school enrollment, attendance, teachers and their salaries, high school graduates, and expenditures. Over the years, the level of detail has gradually increased. By looking at changes in the data over time—for instance, number of schools, participation rates, completion rates, and expenditures—we see how our Nation has progressed.

In 1867, federal law was enacted, providing “That there shall be established, at the City of Washington, a department of education, for the purpose of collecting such statistics and facts as

shall show the condition and progress of education in the several States and Territories, and of diffusing such information respecting the organization and management of schools and school systems, and methods of teaching, as shall aid the people of the United States in the establishment and maintenance of efficient school systems, and otherwise promote the cause of education throughout the country.”

The department was to be headed by a Commissioner of Education. The Commissioner was to be paid a salary of \$4,000 a year and was authorized to appoint three clerks, at annual salaries of \$2,000, \$1,800, and \$1,600, to help carry out the duties of the Commissioner. Two years later, the name of the new department was changed to the Office of Education, its budget was cut back, and



the Commissioner's support staff was reduced from three to two clerks. Also, the Office of Education was moved into the Department of the Interior.

The development of a statistical program proved to be a formidable task. The country was large, its educational system was decentralized, and the staff available to collect statistics was almost nonexistent. One of the early successes of the federal education statistics program was the use of field staff to assist states, localities, and institutions in the preparation of data.

The program tasked with collecting education statistics has changed both Departments and names over time. During most of the 70 years in which education statistics were collected within the Department of the Interior, it was known as the Bureau of Education, but in 1929 its name was restored to the Office of Education. In 1939, it became part of the Federal Security Agency, and in 1953, it was assigned to the newly established

Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. In 1980, a cabinet level Department of Education was created from education offices within the former Department of Health, Education, and Welfare combined with additional education programs from other agencies.

From humble beginnings 150 years ago, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has emerged as one of the major statistical agencies of the federal government. NCES is making groundbreaking innovations in many areas, including digital data collection, adaptive survey design, and interactive geographic mapping. NCES collects information through many surveys, using complex assessments, administrative sources, and samples of schools, institutions, and households. The Center also conducts important research, hosts a number of data tools, provides services such as technical assistance to state and local partners, and produces a wide variety of publications each year.



Today, NCES statistics and reports are used for many different purposes. Policymakers, researchers, educators, parents, students, and the media use NCES data and tools to develop programs, allocate resources, and stay informed about the latest trends in education. NCES publishes several major annual reports that cover topics across the broad spectrum of education.

NCES data also serve as an independent benchmark for states, localities, and institutions around the United States who use these data to compare themselves to other schools and agencies on various measures. Our data show how the United States fares internationally in areas, ranging from education spending to adult literacy. In addition, NCES longitudinal surveys provide data needed to study progressions from early childhood through postsecondary education and into early careers. Data from these surveys can help answer questions such as whether students' high school academic achievement is related to college enrollment and completion.

NCES is an independent and nonpartisan government agency working to provide the most reliable and accurate information possible. NCES also understands the importance of protecting the trust and privacy of survey respondents, including students, parents, and educators.

To ensure that the Center fulfills its mission in providing quality, useful, and timely data operations, NCES is guided by rigorous statistical standards as our nation evolves and continues to move forward into the 21st century. The ongoing role of NCES in collecting relevant, timely, and high-quality data is as important as ever. We will continue to collect, analyze, and publish data on education issues of long-standing interest. In addition, we remain poised to collect data on new and emerging areas in education and we welcome your collaboration in our efforts. 

# Federal education data: 1860s to today



Historic Event



Legislation



NCES History

1862  
**First Morrill Act**

1861–1865  
**American Civil War**

1860

1867  
**Department of Education Act** established the U.S. Department of Education.

1872  
Congress authorized the agency to hire its **first statistician**.

1870  
**Statistical surveys** of what is now NCES began.

1869  
**The Office of Education** was moved into the Department of the Interior and remained there for 70 years.

1890  
**Second Morrill Act**  
The **data collection program** was expanded to include private elementary and secondary school enrollment, teachers, and graduates; enrollment by subject field in public high schools; public school revenue receipts by source; and income and value of physical plants of institutions of higher education.

1900

1917  
**Smith-Hughes Act** established the Federal-State Program for Vocational Education.

1914–1918  
**World War I**

1920  
**The statistical program** included a detailed breakdown of public school expenditures by purpose and of higher education income by source of funds.

1923  
Authorized to hire four new **“Principal Statistical Assistants”** who made visits “to the field” every 2 years.

1929–1939  
**The Great Depression**

1943  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Act** provided assistance to veterans with disabilities.

1939  
Became part of the **Federal Security Agency**.

1939–1945  
**World War II**

1946  
**National School Lunch Act**

1944  
**Servicemen’s Readjustment Act**, also known as the GI Bill.

1948  
**United States Information and Educational Exchange Act**

Initiated a **survey of earned degrees** conferred by major field of study.

1950

1950  
**Financial Assistance for Local Educational Agencies Affected by Federal Activities**

1954  
**Educational Research Act**

1958  
**National Defense Education Act**

1957  
**Sputnik launched.**

1953  
Assigned to the **newly established Department of Health, Education, and Welfare**.

1962  
The **National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)** was established.

Prepared and published the first ***Digest of Education Statistics***.



1972

Establishment of longitudinal surveys with the **National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972**.

1983

Publication of *A Nation at Risk*.

1965  
**Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965**

1975  
**Education for All Handicapped Children Act**

Prepared and published the first *Condition of Education* report.

1979  
**Department of Education Organization Act** established a U.S. Department of Education containing functions previously assigned to other agencies.

1986–87  
First conducted the **National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS)**.

1991  
First conducted the **National Household Education Survey (NHES)**.

1995  
Administered the first **Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)**.

1964  
**Civil Rights Act of 1964**

1985  
**Montgomery GI Bill**

1990  
First trial of **NAEP state assessment**.

1994  
**Goals 2000: Educate America Act**

2002

**No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**  
**Education Sciences Reform Act**

2001

**States required to participate in NAEP** reading and mathematics at grades 4 and 8 every two years.

Conducted the **Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)**.

2000

Administered the first **Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)**.

2015

**Every Student Succeeds Act**  
**NAEP assessments were piloted on tablets** with an attached keyboard, a stylus, and earbuds.

2000

1969  
Launched the **National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)**.

1978  
**Middle Income Student Assistance Act**  
First conducted the **Common Core of Data (CCD)**.

1980s  
Designed the **Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)**.  
1980  
**The Bureau of Education was separated** from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and a new cabinet-level Department of Education came into existence.

1987–88  
First conducted the **Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)**.

1993  
**Student Loan Reform Act**

1998–99  
First conducted the **Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99 (ECLS-K)**, a nationally representative assessment of entering kindergarten students.

2009  
**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009**

2011  
**NAEP-TIMSS Linking Study** enabled comparisons of state mathematics and science results with other nations.

2017  
**NAEP administered digitally based** mathematics, reading, and writing assessments.



## Commissioner of Education Statistics Emerson Elliott



*120 Years of American Education (1992)*

*NCES statistics and reports are used for myriad purposes. Congress, federal agencies, state and local officials, business leaders, scholars and researchers, the news media, and the general public use our data to formulate programs, apportion resources, monitor services, research issues, and inform and make decisions.*





# Annual Reports History

The history of the statistical program of the Department of Education would not be complete without mentioning a few of the major publications that have served as primary sources for the field of education.

From 1870 through 1917, the statistics collected by the Office of Education appeared in the *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Education*. These large hardbound volumes contained not only results from statistical surveys compiled through administrative record collections, but also text reports from the states and current education research essays. From 1918 through 1958, the series

was restructured to focus on biennial statistical surveys, typically released as large hardbound compilations of two to four volumes. The *Biennial Survey of Education in the United States* usually contained chapters on state school systems, city school systems, and institutions of higher education, as well as a summary chapter covering all levels of education. Additional chapters periodically covered such topics as offerings and enrollments in high school subjects, statistics of public secondary schools, special education for children with disabilities, statistics of private elementary and secondary schools, and library statistics.

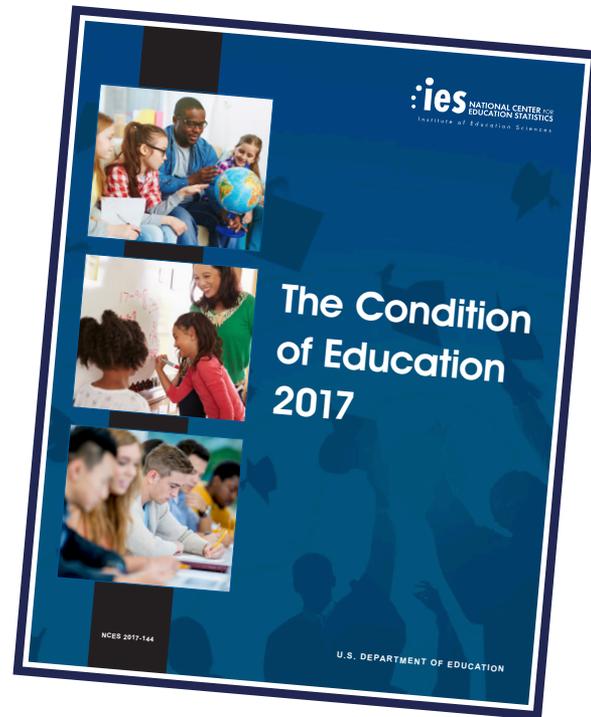


After the demise of the *Biennial Survey* in the late 1950s, there was a recognition of a need for a publication that would bring together in one convenient volume a summary of the different kinds of data being collected by NCES. To fulfill this need, the first *Digest of Education Statistics* was prepared and published in 1962. The *Digest* provides a compilation of statistical information covering the broad field of American education from prekindergarten through graduate school. Subject matter includes the number of schools and colleges, teachers, enrollments, and graduates, in addition to data on educational attainment, finances, federal funds for education, libraries,

and international education. Over the years, the *Digest* has responded to the growing data needs of policymakers by adding new information on children with disabilities, preprimary education, career and technical education, educational attainment, and salary data. Continuing improvements include expanding the quantity of state-level tables, constructing tables to show institution-level data for large school districts and colleges, and adding more data on race/ethnicity. More than 50 years later, the greatly expanded *Digest*, with over 600 tables, continues to meet the needs of data users by providing numerous trend tables, as well as the latest data from all NCES surveys.

NCES has prepared the “condition of education” annually since the first congressional mandate in 1974. The *Condition of Education* provides timely data on the status and progress of education in this country. It uses an “indicators” approach to address both perennial and emerging issues with relevant figures and descriptive text.

The *Digest* and *Condition*, along with other more specialized summary reports from NCES, continue the tradition of providing accessible and relevant information to policymakers, reporters, researchers, and the general public through modern, convenient, and searchable online editions. ◆



## Historical summary of public elementary and secondary school statistics: Selected years, 1869–70 through 2013–14

Selected characteristic	1869–70	1899–1900	1949–50	1999–2000	2013–14
<b>Total population (in thousands)</b>	<b>38,558</b>	<b>75,995</b>	<b>149,188</b>	<b>279,040</b>	<b>316,427</b>
5- to 17-year-olds (in thousands)	11,683	21,573	30,223	52,811	53,739
5- to 17-year-olds as a percent of total population	30.3	28.4	20.3	18.9	17.0
<b>Total enrollment in elementary and secondary schools (in thousands)</b>	<b>7,562</b>	<b>15,503</b>	<b>25,112</b>	<b>46,857</b>	<b>50,045</b>
Prekindergarten through grade 8 (in thousands)	7,481	14,984	19,387	33,486	35,251
Grades 9–12 (in thousands)	80	519	5,725	13,371	14,794
<b>Enrollment as a percent of total population</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>15.8</b>
<b>Enrollment as a percent of 5- to 17-year-olds</b>	<b>64.7</b>	<b>71.9</b>	<b>83.1</b>	<b>88.7</b>	<b>93.1</b>
<b>Percent of total enrollment in grades 9–12</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>28.5</b>	<b>29.6</b>
<b>Average length of school term, in days</b>	<b>132.2</b>	<b>144.3</b>	<b>177.9</b>	<b>179.4</b>	<b>179.5</b>
<b>Average number of days attended per pupil</b>	<b>78.4</b>	<b>99.0</b>	<b>157.9</b>	<b>169.2</b>	<b>—</b>
<b>Teachers, teacher aides, librarians, and guidance counselors (in thousands)</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>920</b>	<b>3,682</b>	<b>3,999</b>
<b>Total expenditures for public schools (in millions)</b>	<b>\$63</b>	<b>\$215</b>	<b>\$5,838</b>	<b>\$381,838</b>	<b>\$625,016</b>
<b>Annual salary of classroom teachers</b>	<b>\$189</b>	<b>\$325</b>	<b>\$3,010</b>	<b>\$41,807</b>	<b>\$56,610</b>

— Not available.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 201.10.

For footnotes and more information, go to [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_201.10.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_201.10.asp?current=yes).

**Historical summary of faculty, enrollment, and degrees conferred in degree-granting postsecondary institutions:  
Selected years, 1869–70 through 2014–15**

<b>Selected characteristic</b>	<b>1869–70</b>	<b>1899–1900</b>	<b>1949–50</b>	<b>1999–2000</b>	<b>2014–15</b>
<b>Total institutions</b>	<b>563</b>	<b>977</b>	<b>1,851</b>	<b>4,084</b>	<b>4,627</b>
<b>Total faculty</b>	<b>5,553</b>	<b>23,868</b>	<b>246,722</b>	<b>1,027,830</b>	<b>1,551,000</b>
Males	4,887	19,151	186,189	602,469	792,000
Females	666	4,717	60,533	425,361	759,000
<b>Total fall enrollment</b>	<b>52,286</b>	<b>237,592</b>	<b>2,444,900</b>	<b>14,791,224</b>	<b>20,207,369</b>
Males	41,160	152,254	1,721,572	6,490,646	8,797,061
Females	11,126	85,338	723,328	8,300,578	11,410,308
<b>Degrees conferred</b>					
<b>Associate's, total</b>	—	—	—	<b>564,933</b>	<b>1,013,971</b>
<i>Percent female</i>	—	—	—	60	61
<b>Bachelor's, total</b>	<b>9,371</b>	<b>27,410</b>	<b>432,058</b>	<b>1,237,875</b>	<b>1,894,934</b>
Males	7,993	22,173	328,841	530,367	812,669
Females	1,378	5,237	103,217	707,508	1,082,265
<i>Percent female</i>	15	19	24	57	57
<b>Master's, total</b>	—	<b>1,583</b>	<b>58,183</b>	<b>463,185</b>	<b>758,708</b>
<i>Percent female</i>	—	19	29	58	60
<b>Doctor's, total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>6,420</b>	<b>118,736</b>	<b>178,547</b>
<i>Percent female</i>	0	6	10	45	52
<b>Percentage of persons 25 years old and over with a bachelor's or higher degree</b>	—	—	<b>6</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>33</b>

— Not available.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 301.20, Table 104.10.

For footnotes and more information, go to [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_301.20.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_301.20.asp?current=yes) and [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_104.10.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_104.10.asp?current=yes).

# Leadership

The successes of the wide scope of NCES surveys and activities have been accomplished through the efforts of many talented and dedicated staff. Organizing the resources of NCES, coordinating efforts across a range of complex surveys, and engaging in productive dialogs with major national and international agencies and offices has put the NCES Commissioner in a highly influential position to improve the value of education statistics. The NCES staff listed below are among those who have served in the top leadership position at NCES and have guided the agency through numerous challenges and successes since the establishment of NCES in the mid 1960s.

**1965-67:**

**Alexander M. Mood**

Assistant Commissioner

**1968-74: Dorothy M. Gilford**

Assistant Commissioner

**1975: Francis C. Nassetta**

Acting Administrator

**1976-84: Marie D. Eldridge**

Administrator

**1984: Francis V. Corrtigan**

Acting Administrator

**1985-87: Emerson J. Elliott**

Director

**1988-95: Emerson J. Elliott**

Commissioner

**1996: Jeanne E. Griffith**

Acting Commissioner

**1997-99:**

**Pascal D. Forgione, Jr.**

Commissioner

**2000-02: Gary W. Phillips**

Acting Commissioner

**2003: Valena Plisko**

Associate Commissioner

**2004: Robert Lerner**

Commissioner

**2005:**

**Grover J. Whitehurst**

Acting Commissioner

**2006-08: Mark Schneider**

Commissioner

**2009-10: Stuart Kerachsky**

Acting Commissioner

**2011-14: Jack Buckley**

Commissioner

**2014: John Q. Easton**

Acting Commissioner

**2014-present:**

**Peggy G. Carr**

Acting Commissioner



**Acting Commissioner of Education Statistics Peggy Carr**  
(2017)

*Groundbreaking work underway at NCES will expand on the Center's founding mission: to measure and understand the condition and progress of education in America by collecting data that fully reflect the range of educational experiences of all of our nation's students. This new work is guided by our core values, which include faithful commitment to producing accurate, transparent, and objective data. The Center remains dedicated to doing the absolute best quantitative research in the field, and conducting that research on a timeline that makes it relevant and useful to our stakeholders.*





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