



Ensuring Objective and Reliable Education Statistics

Reauthorization Priorities for the National Center for Education Statistics

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides information on the condition of education through administrative data collection, status and longitudinal surveys, and assessments. Founded in 1867, NCES is the second oldest and third largest by budget among the 13 principal federal statistical agencies.

Desired Outcome – We urge changes in the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) in order to:

Ensure education statistics are objective, nonpartisan, trustworthy, and relevant because of their wide use for education decisions by families, students, and researchers as well as by school and education administrators, policymakers, and media.

Reauthorization Priorities – To meet this outcome, ESRA should:

- Provide NCES final authority over its budget allocation, hiring, IT, contracting, and publications. Following the model of federal statistical agencies, NCES should have full control over its operations to be clearly accountable, avoiding opportunities for inappropriate external influences.
- Preserve presidential appointment status and reinstate Senate confirmation for the NCES Commissioner. Senate oversight of the NCES commissioner appointment helps ensure a qualified leader and objective education statistics for our nation. Further, presidential appointment and Senate confirmation provides the commissioner with more authority to advocate for independence and relevance of NCES data.
- As part of publication autonomy, make NCES' name and agency-specific logo the prominent name and logo on all NCES' webpages, reports, and products. Because trust in a statistical agency is paramount, NCES' name should be known and associated with its products.
- Restore NCES confidential treatment and protections of data. The quality of NCES data requires survey respondents to trust that NCES will protect their information.

See this March 2023 publication for in-depth discussion: [What Protects the Autonomy of the Federal Statistical Agencies? An Assessment of the Procedures in Place that Protect the Independence and Objectivity of Official Statistics.](#)

[Department of Education founded in 1867 to provide statistics](#)

“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.”

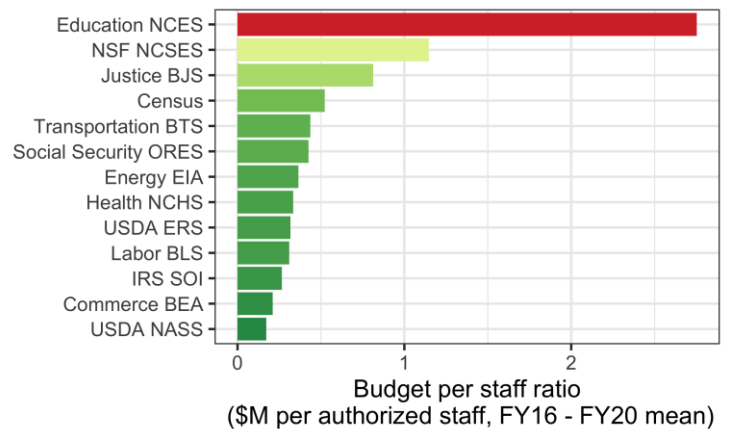
Declining autonomy and stature –The 1988 [Hawkins- Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments Act](#) made the NCES commissioner presidentially appointed and Senate confirmed and provided NCES sufficient autonomy to ensure objective and reliable

- 2000's
 - NCES moved under Institute of Education Sciences losing publication and budget autonomy, staff appointment and contracting authority, and its advisory panel
 - NCES confidential protections of data weakened
- 2012
 - Senate confirmation of NCES Commissioner removed
- 2014-23
 - Legislative and administrative proposals to remove presidential appointment of NCES commissioner
 - 2020 administration proposal to separate assessments to non-NCES center
 - IES branding campaign to lessen focus on centers, undermining NCES further

products. Since then, NCES has lost protections, threatening its ability to produce high-quality, objective data. In addition, a weaker NCES makes it more susceptible to further weakening.



Strained staff and budget resources – NCES has a staff of approximately 95 people for a budget of \$306 million. The budget-to-staff ratio of \$3.2 million per FTE is eight times the median ratio of the other principal federal statistical agencies, as the top graph illustrates. The [staffing crisis](#) makes NCES overly dependent on external contractors to conduct planning, technical quality review and analysis functions that should be internal federal activities. Further, for the specialized expertise NCES needs, contractors are often more expensive than direct staff FTEs. NCES’ ability to carry out its work is also challenged by its more than 19% loss in purchasing power over the past 13 years, as shown in the bottom graph.



Guidance and Support – Stronger autonomy and stature provisions for NCES are supported by the [Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018](#), [OMB Statistical Policy Directive #1](#), the National Academies’ [Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency](#) and [A Vision and Roadmap for Education Statistics](#), AERA’s [Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Institute of Education Sciences](#), and 20 [former statistical agency heads](#).

