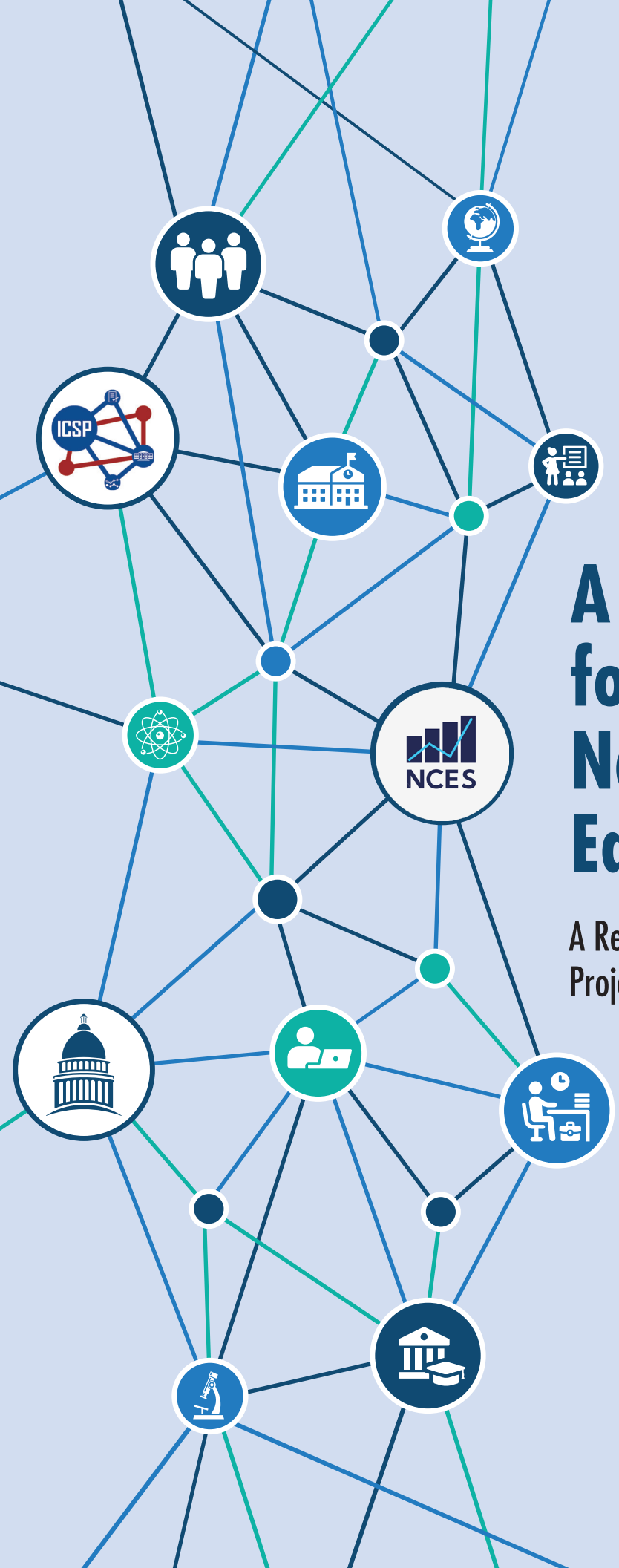

A Vision and Strategy for Remaking the National Center for Education Statistics

A Report from the American Statistical Association Project Team on Re-envisioning NCES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every modern nation requires a statistical infrastructure it can trust to monitor and report on the condition and progress of the country across domains such as health, the workforce, the economy, transportation, justice, and education. In the United States, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) was established to fulfill that role for education: namely, to provide the professional independence, scientific rigor, statutory responsibility, and national partnerships needed to produce reliable, comparable, and actionable education statistics and to provide public leadership for the nation's education data ecosystem. States, the federal government, educational institutions at all levels, researchers, and the public depend on this information to understand conditions, benchmark performance, and make informed decisions. No other organization combines the authority and reach, technical expertise and national partnerships, and long-term stewardship and leadership needed to sustain this public good. As the nation's common statistical foundation for education, NCES makes possible meaningful comparisons, informed decision-making, public accountability, and a healthy education data ecosystem.

Over its nearly 160 years of fulfilling this role, NCES has come to have three distinct sets of responsibilities: (1) to monitor and report on the condition and progress of education in the United States; (2) to support state, district, and school capacity to collect and report data in a standardized way to shed light on the effectiveness of school reforms; and (3) to provide leadership within the U.S. Department of Education and the federal statistical system (FSS) in order to increase government-wide evidence-building capacity and efficiency. These last two sets of responsibilities, each added in the past few decades and important in its own right, have expanded NCES's scope of work and have created significant potential for NCES to fulfill its first purpose even more proficiently. This paper argues that pursuing the three in tandem can have a far greater effect than the sum of them pursued individually.

This paper lays out the case for re-envisioning NCES both because NCES has been constrained for years from fully meeting 21st-century information demands due to its 20th-century structures, processes, and resources, and because these longstanding weaknesses were compounded by the headlong dismantling of NCES in early 2025, which gutted institutional expertise and capacity and weakened or halted most of its statistical collections and production. The disruption was damaging to immediate data needs, and it will take years to fully recover the lost expertise and capacity. Yet, this disruption has created an opportunity to reenvision:

> (a) NCES's role in an evolving data landscape reshaped by artificial intelligence (AI), the awareness of untapped potentials of data linkages, declining survey participation rates, eroded public trust, increased concerns about data privacy, demands for cross-sector analysis, and ever-growing expectations for ever-more-timely public information;
>
> (b) NCES's institutional relationships, structures, operating model, and capacity so it can lead effectively in this new environment; and
>
> (c) how, given all these new realities, NCES can help the national education data ecosystem function better for all.

This moment calls not for abandoning NCES's historic purposes, which remain vital, but for embracing new ways to meet them even more fully than before. To take up this challenge, the American Statistical Association (ASA) organized conversations about the future of NCES and the education data ecosystem with providers and consumers of education data, inside and outside of government and across the political spectrum. There is virtually universal agreement that NCES performs unique, essential functions that must be continued and strengthened. However, there is also a broad consensus that the agency should not be restored to its 2024 operating model. It must move beyond its pre-2025 status quo, expand its internal capacity, strategically prioritize its core work, rebuild public trust in federal education data, and inform national priorities that connect education to other fields that heavily depend on education outcomes, such as health and the workforce. To succeed, NCES must modernize by delivering more timely, actionable data, effectively utilizing emerging technologies like AI while rigorously safeguarding privacy and equity, and strengthening partnerships across the education data ecosystem and within the federal statistical system.

The ASA project team is grateful to colleagues across the education policy, program, and data landscape, and experts in federal statistics, for contributing to its re-envisioning effort. Building from those ideas, we envision a future with a healthy education data ecosystem anchored by NCES, in which states, schools, communities, and other stakeholders have access to relevant, timely, and objective statistics to inform decisions and policies in support of improving the condition and progress of education. In this vision, as explained fully in the paper, NCES's leadership within the education data ecosystem is much more intentional and strategic (rising on par with its statutory missions to monitor and report on the condition of education and fulfill the responsibilities of a recognized statistical agency).

To realize this vision, this paper then lays out a strategy that rests on the fact that NCES occupies a unique position at the intersection of the education data ecosystem and the FSS, where it can carry out its three sets of responsibilities in a more fully integrated way than it has previously—to the advantage of each. Fundamentally, creating a stronger education data ecosystem and stronger, more seamless statistical system allows NCES to much more readily modernize how it meets its responsibility to report on the condition and progress of education: namely, by shifting from a survey-centric model to a curation-centric one. *Curating data* at its heart entails identifying, selecting, and accessing already-existing data when possible, designing data collections as complements to already-existing data when necessary; evaluating those data; and enhancing their usefulness (e.g., by contextualizing them, linking and organizing them, or linking/aligning them with data from other sources).

Because this vision and strategy must come in iterations, we provide a sketch of key outcomes to which a future roadmap will need to lead, including:

- Trusted and transparent data stewardship;
- Aligned executive branch responsibility, authority, and incentives;
- Strengthened ties between NCES and the broader FSS; and
- Deepened engagement with state education agencies (SEAs) and other key stakeholders.

We also recognize that NCES cannot realize this vision or implement this strategy alone. Thus we also provide an initial call to action for a range of stakeholders to: (a) build consensus around a vision and strategy for NCES's future, and (b) engage Congressional, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and Departmental leaders to inform, motivate, and support forward progress toward the vision of a healthy national education data ecosystem cultivated by a healthy NCES that is successfully meeting the nation's education data needs.

We intend this report as a basis for building a community ready to improve and advance this vision and strategy, and to support the development and implementation of a roadmap. Those additional voices, which include those who contribute to and use NCES data and those who care about the future of American education, can and should shape the details of a fuller roadmap in the coming months.

ORGANIZATION OF PAPER

This paper provides a comprehensive overview of NCES's full operational scope and lays out a way to use it to re-envision NCES for the future. Specifically, the paper examines:

- **NCES's Mandates and Their Interdependence:** How NCES has three core sets of responsibilities that can be leveraged to support one another, and the systemic risks of abandoning its non-collection duties.
- **What ASA Heard from Stakeholders:** Consensus around NCES's indispensable work as well as the need to streamline its operations and support the broader effort to modernize NCES and the FSS.
- **A Vision and Path Forward:** A framework grounded in stakeholder consensus and actionable recommendations to help NCES continue to fulfill its responsibilities in a modernized data ecosystem and FSS.

INTRODUCTION

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) over time has come to have three distinct but interrelated purposes, each with its own set of responsibilities. The first is longstanding and familiar: to be the collector and disseminator of data and statistics on the condition and progress of education in the United States. The second, added by Congress in the 1990s, is a requirement to support state, district, and school capacity to collect and report data in a standardized way to shed light on the effectiveness of school reforms. The third, added through a 2019 law to increase government-wide evidence-building capacity and efficiency, is a requirement for NCES to provide leadership within the U.S. Department of Education and the federal statistical system (FSS) to foster evidence-building. These last two sets of responsibilities, each important in its own right, have expanded NCES's scope of work and also have created significant potential for NCES to fulfill its first purpose even more proficiently. In short, this paper argues that pursuing the three in tandem can have a far greater effect than the sum of them pursued individually.

Until 2025, when NCES's Commissioner was abruptly removed and its agency staff cut from 103 to 3, NCES fulfilled these sets of responsibilities in three largely independent ways:

1. managing an extensive portfolio of statistical programs and data collections[1] to report comprehensively on the condition of education;
2. supporting states by producing state-level student achievement as part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)[2], sustaining common education data standards, state longitudinal data system programs, and other forums to build up the nation's education data infrastructure; and
3. taking a national statistical leadership role by participating in intra-agency and cross-agency projects to promote the development of shared infrastructure for the production and provision of access to high-quality education and related data. For example, NCES took an active role in implementing the government-wide Standard Application Process (SAP).

[1] For the most complete listing of this portfolio, see https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/annualreports/topical-studies/retrospective.

[2] The introduction of state NAEP assessments was a significant expansion from the original assessment program that reported only on national-level student achievement. See—especially Ch. 7—Jones, L. V., & Olkin, I., eds. (2004). *The Nation's Report Card: Evolution and Perspectives*. Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation. Having a common NAEP "yardstick" to compare all states' student achievement with each other transformed the education data ecosystem by creating the possibility of meaningful data comparisons across states.

Since 2025's major disruption[3], discussions about the future of NCES have focused almost wholly on NCES as a data collector and disseminator. These discussions—including roundtables convened by the ASA specifically to discuss a vision for NCES's future—have tended to crystalize around reassessing, prioritizing, and "re-imagining" NCES's data collections and related studies, with decisions about staffing, organization, and other next steps flowing from those choices. However, they have, with rare exception, left unaddressed NCES's other responsibilities or, more critically, the value and even necessity of them for meeting the first one. This is not a deliberate omission; rather it is due to the fact that most stakeholders, like most restaurant patrons, only see and consume what comes out of the proverbial "kitchen" and are not aware of or do not give much thought to what it takes to keep the kitchen running.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

- NCES Data Collections that are Foundational to the Nation's Education Data Infrastructure
- NCES Collaborative Relationships that Improve Data Quality and Support State and Local Data Capacity
- NCES Surveys that Describe K-12 Education From the Perspective of the Nation's Educators and Administrators

Therefore, this paper examines all three sets of responsibilities in depth. It notes examples of how NCES was able to use results from one set to help meet others. It considers the effects of discontinuing some of its responsibilities. It offers a picture of the totality of NCES's purposes and accomplishments. It informs the future by examining how meeting these responsibilities in an integrated manner could allow the government to be more efficient and cost-effective. It also considers NCES's future in light of ASA's complementary project on modernizing the FSS. It then explains what stakeholders agree on regarding what NCES needs to accomplish, what vision and strategy make sense given NCES's mission and its stakeholders' needs, and what recommendations can be made for future action. The paper either implicitly or explicitly takes into account work by our colleague Gail Mulligan on NCES's foundational data collections, collaborative relationships to provide better statistics, and work to provide insights on K-12 education from the perspective of educators and administrators. See box on this page.

THE ORIGINS AND PURPOSE OF NCES'S THREE SETS OF RESPONSIBILITIES

NCES's first purpose: monitoring and reporting on the condition and progress of U.S. education

NCES's original "mission" traces its origins to legislation in 1867, which directed the establishment of an agency for:

> 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 United States.

This purpose has remained in place over the past 160 years. Today, we see that states, the federal government, institutions of higher education, and other actors within the U.S. education system rely on national and comparative education statistics to

[3] For a discussion of this disruption, see DiPerna, P. (2025). *The Collapse of America's Education Data Infrastructure.* *https://informedchoice1996.substack.com/p/the-collapse-of-americas-education*.

understand and make decisions about the ongoing educational enterprises that they lead or in which they have a stake. These statistics help them to understand the extent, efficiency, effectiveness, and outcomes of educational efforts across different levels of education, geography, demographic groups, and over time.

Yet, as the nation's school systems and the scope of "education" have expanded dramatically, so too have the amount and sources of education data. Once, the agency could rely on state superintendents' annual reports to collect and compile the information it reported on the state of education in the country. For at least the past half century, however, NCES has had to devise new ways to collect and report data from ever more entities and make them comparable to meet its mission. For example, during the decades of school integration in the 1960s and 1970s, policymakers turned to NCES to convert the hodgepodge of school enrollment data compiled by states and localities into comparable data that could be broken down by consistent race and ethnicity categories. After the tragedy of Columbine High School in 1999, policymakers turned to NCES for data on school shootings and safety measures, which state departments of education did not then collect consistently. In the early 2000s, Congress tasked NCES specifically to create consistent measurements for high school graduation rates, collect data on the teaching profession, and participate in specific international comparative studies. During the Covid-19 pandemic in the early 2020s, policymakers again turned to NCES for national-level data to better understand the variety, extent, and impact of school health, closure, and attendance policies across school districts and states. Today, national-level information on school policies regarding the use of smart phones and artificial intelligence (AI) is needed by policymakers, but once again data on these critical but evolving topics are not systematically or consistently available.

In each of these cases, promoting better education for the common good has required reliable, comparable, and timely statistical information for policymakers to understand the condition of education and the effects of policies and practices. The information that was available could not meet stakeholder's needs in its "raw form": it had to be standardized, made consistent, and often combined with other information to be meaningful. In some cases, no one collected information on the topic, and NCES had to collect it directly. This type of curating work is something that requires a federal agency to undertake. The reasons for this are both practical—no state can justify spending state funds doing such national-level work, and no private entity has the resources and financial interest to do so—and ideal— a federal statistical agency with technical expertise and professional autonomy is ideally suited to carry out such work because it can uphold both the scientific rigor and political independence necessary for public trust in the data.

In most discussions about NCES and especially at the ASA roundtables, these points have been widely recognized and repeated. In fact, most attention has focused on the specific surveys or other data collection vehicles through which NCES has traditionally collected and curated data. Often overlooked in these discussions, except by those who work directly with data from states, districts, or institutions of higher education, is the critical role NCES serves as the backbone of the national education data infrastructure: without which, the national structure will collapse into multiple disconnected state systems.

NCES's second purpose: sustaining the national education data infrastructure

In response to the wave of school reforms catalyzed by the 1983 release of *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform*, Congress charged NCES with the responsibility to document these reform efforts, which emphasized assessment, accountability, and reporting.[4] It required NCES to establish the National Cooperative Education Statistics System, a joint federal–state framework, to produce uniform and comparable education data. And it required NCES to support capability-building efforts at the state, district, and school level to report data in a standardized way and shed light on the

[4] Public Law 103-382, Title IV, includes among the Center's duties "compiling and disseminating data on State and local education reform activities" [sec. 404(a)(1)(A)]. This led to the publication of the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics's *Overview and Inventory of State Education Reforms: 1990 to 2000*, NCES 2003–020, by David Hurst, Alexandra Tan, Anne Meek, and Jason Sellers. Project Officer: Edith McArthur. Washington, DC: 2003. It is important to note that while "this report inventories state-level reform efforts of the 1990s, it makes no attempt to evaluate these initiatives."

effectiveness of these school reforms. Later, concurrent with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, Congress increased NCES's responsibilities for supporting states with the passage of the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002.This act requires NCES to award and manage grants to states to develop their own longitudinal student data systems. The act also requires NCES to provide technical assistance related to these data systems and states' data use efforts.

NCES met its charge to document and support state school reform efforts in two key ways. First, as the authoritative source for official national education statistics, NCES developed national datasets and systems that effectively became anchors for data systems in the various states and territories. For example, by developing, maintaining, and improving NAEP, the Common Core of Data (CCD), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), NCES created the "backbone" data systems that make possible state comparisons of assessment results, accountability, and postsecondary costs and outcomes. Second, NCES created, sustained, and led numerous voluntary partnerships that yielded common definitions, classifications, and coding systems (e.g., through the Forum and its Common Education Data Standards program); technical standards; and a shared understanding of what data are useful and necessary to collect. These efforts, in turn, transformed the environment for all participants in the education data ecosystem (e.g., state and local education agencies, researchers, advocacy groups, philanthropies, and businesses), enabling those participants to then collaborate in identifying data-related best practices, have technical assistance needs met, and take advantage of funding opportunities. While these efforts focused heavily on states initially, over time they have included many additional participants, critical as the diversity of education arrangements continued to grow. Thus, by meeting the nation's data needs for reform and comparisons, NCES created the foundational infrastructure and relationships that today have come to anchor and define the national education data ecosystem.[5]

While NCES did not explicitly envision the creation of the education data ecosystem as an outcome of its work, it created the conditions for this ecosystem to emerge in the digital age because this work grew to be essential to fulfill its mission. Given its position in the decentralized U.S. education system, a federal statistical agency like NCES can only do its job well if participants in the ecosystem recognize, value, use, and contribute good-quality data to the free flow of information throughout the ecosystem. Thus fostering the development of the ecosystem served the interests of NCES, the federal government, and the public good. In short, its efforts were a "win-win" for the American people, who received better data at lower cost, and for subnational partners, who grew their capacity to collect, report, and use data for their own needs. For more on the collaborative relationships NCES cultivated within the ecosystem, see NCES Collaborative Relationships that Improve Data Quality and Support State and Local Data Capacity.

NCES's third purpose: fulfilling the requirements of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act to strengthen and expand evidence-building capacity

NCES's third set of responsibilities emerges from the long and uneven development of the FSS.[6] Rather than being created at a single moment, that system developed piecemeal in response to particular constitutional mandates, administrative needs, and policy questions. The decennial census began in 1790; federal collection of trade statistics grew from the Treasury's need to administer tariff revenues; and the census gradually expanded to include manufacturing, agriculture, and other economic activity. In the 1860s, Congress authorized the collection of statistics on agriculture, education, and income separately from the

[5] The term "education data ecosystem" to describe the totality of the participants that contribute to a national education data infrastructure was used by the National Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) in their 2022 report on NCES (described later in this paper). We use "national" with the term to help define and underscore the scope—intentionally not using the word federal, as it is mostly owned and run by non-federal participants.

[6] The FSS currently includes more than 100 agencies, units, and programs engaged in statistical activities. Within that decentralized structure, the 13 recognized statistical agencies (RSAs) have the core mission of collecting, processing, analyzing, and disseminating statistical information. OMB, chiefly through the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs and the Chief Statistician of the United States, provides system-wide coordination.

census; in 1884 it created the Bureau of Labor in response to demand for information on industrial workers. The Census Bureau became a permanent agency in 1902.[7]

Over time, these distinct efforts grew into a decentralized federal statistical system spanning education, health, labor, justice, transportation, agriculture, the economy, and other fields. Congress and successive administrations have repeatedly sought to make that system more coherent: improving coordination among agencies, reducing reporting burden, protecting confidential information, strengthening data quality, and establishing common standards for official statistics. Federal coordination developed especially through the OMB's statistical-policy function, whose institutional roots extend to the 1930s, and through the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy, established administratively in the late 1980s and authorized by statute in 1995.[8]

This history also reflects a broader and continuing effort—within government and through domestic and international professional communities—to articulate the principles that should govern official statistics: professional independence, scientific integrity, relevance, transparency, comparability, and protection of confidentiality. NCES's responsibilities therefore extend beyond just producing education data.[9] They include contributing to, and helping sustain, the national statistical infrastructure and data ecosystem on which sound public decision-making depends.

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act), signed in 2019, represents the most comprehensive recent congressional effort to strengthen that infrastructure. It requires federal agencies to plan for evidence-building, improve data accessibility and management, and support the responsible use of data and statistical information for policymaking. In this context, NCES's statutory role is not simply to collect and publish education statistics and to support the education data infrastructure but to:

- uphold the professional standards, institutional capacity, and public trust necessary for education data to serve the nation over the long term,
- help build government-wide evidence capacity, and
- represent education within the FSS.[10]

As one of the 13 legally recognized statistical agencies (RSAs), NCES now has statistical responsibilities at three levels: its own portfolio needed to report on the condition and progress of education; across the Department of Education's programs and data assets, and across the broader federal statistical system, especially where infrastructure and data from more than one agency are needed to build evidence-informed policymaking.

For NCES, three Evidence Act requirements are especially important.

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[7] Committee on National Statistics. (2017). Brief History of the U.S. Federal Statistical System. In *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*, 6th ed, ed Constance F. Citro, 19-20. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. *https://www.nationalacademies.org/read/24810/chapter/7; U.S. Census Bureau*. Economic Census History.In Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives and Records Administration.

[8] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM). Organization of the Federal Statistical System. In *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*, 7th ed., Appendix B. ; Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Pub. L. No. 104–13, § 101, 109 Stat. 163, codified at 44 U.S.C. § 3504(e).

[9] For a summary of these efforts, see *https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2014/12/02/2014-28326/statistical-policy-directive-no-1-fundamental-responsibilities-of-federal-statistical-agencies-and*

[10] https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/4174.

1. Meeting the core responsibilities of a statistical agency
   Each RSA must produce and disseminate timely information, conduct credible statistical work, maintain objectivity, and protect confidentiality[11] and trust. OMB's implementing regulation, often called the Trust Regulation, gives these responsibilities practical force by noting that RSAs need adequate statistical, technical, administrative, and IT capacity; independent statistical judgment; and regular, transparent communication with stakeholders, including Congress and data users

   For NCES, this has direct operational implications. The law and regulation require the Department and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) to "enable, support, and facilitate" NCES in meeting its responsibilities by setting aligned policy and practice and providing capacities, structures, and protections.

2. Statistical leadership within the Department of Education
   As the Department's Statistical Official, the NCES Commissioner must lead on data quality, confidentiality, and related statistical matters. That role includes setting standards, advising on new data collections, and helping ensure that administrative and program data are usable for both operational and analytical purposes. When it works well, NCES gains a better view of departmental data needs, while program offices gain better data. The Internal Revenue Service Statistical Official's role in supporting the College Scorecard is a useful example.[12]

3. Shared leadership in the federal statistical system
   The NCES Commissioner also serves on the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy, helping govern the FSS. In that role, NCES helps build shared infrastructure, apply common statistical policy and technical standards and safeguards, and support cross-cutting evidence work that spans agency boundaries, such as the education-to-workforce pipeline.[13]

The Evidence Act reinforces this direction by expanding data-sharing authorities, adding common safeguards, and encouraging work on problems no single agency can solve alone. The goal is a more seamless system: one that is more efficient, more resilient, and better able to answer complex policy questions.

OMB has made clear that individual agencies can no longer focus only on their own missions. The FSS is intended to operate as a seamless whole, stewarding sensitive data and enabling stronger evidence-building, civic engagement, and public and private decision-making. In that framework, the Evidence Act's requirements are mutually reinforcing: they strengthen both individual agencies and the system as a whole while avoiding the disruption and other downsides of creating a singular, consolidated federal statistical system.[14]

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[11] Obligations, penalties, and protections for data acquired by an RSA for exclusively statistical purposes with a pledge of confidentiality are specified in Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002, updated and codified by the Evidence Act. These obligations, penalties, and protections are among the strictest in federal law. See OMB's implementation guidance on these provisions: *https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2007/06/15/E7-11542/implementation-guidance-for-title-v-of-the-e-government-act-confidential-information-protection-and*.

[12] See here for a general description of the Treasury Statistical Official role: *https://home.treasury.gov/about/general-information/orders-and-directives/treasury-order-102-27*. More specific detail about the Treasury SO's role in College Scorecard is available via Barry Johnson, former Statistical Official, Department of Treasury, discussion with the author, Washington, DC, July 2026.

[13] Leveraging Federal Statistics to Strengthen Evidence-Based Decision-Making. *https://statspolicy.gov/assets/fcsm/files/docs/OMB_AP_LeveragingFedStats_fy2025.pdf*.

[14] ASA's Modernizing the FSS report (2026) defines these costs as: transition costs, reluctance to distance statistical agencies from data producers and users in current home departments, risks of empowering efforts to politicize the agencies, and uncertainty about whether consolidation is necessary or sufficient for modernization. Creating a new separate agency in an era of downsizing will be a heavy lift; the current administration, authorizing committees, appropriators, or parent departments may resist.

The three purposes considered together

Of NCES's three core purposes and responsibilities, NCES's first purpose—tracking the condition and progress of education—remains its most visible. Its second purpose—supporting data capacity in states and other entities—is less visible but essential to the first. Its third purpose—strengthening and expanding evidence capacity—is the newest and least fully implemented, not only at NCES but government-wide. Progress on this third role depends heavily on OMB, which is required to issue two additional regulations governing data sharing and data protection.[15] As a result, implementation of the Evidence Act government-wide and within the Department has been uneven and tangible benefits have been limited. Even so, the logic of the role is clear: statistical agencies can improve data quality and access across government, create efficiencies through shared standards and infrastructure, and build capacity to address cross-cutting questions that no single agency can answer.[16]

To demonstrate how addressing one set of responsibilities can support another, we provide a few examples.

- In meeting its need to adequately measure a new type of educational credential, NCES created and led the Interagency Working Group on Expanded Measures of Enrollment and Attainment (GEMEnA). This collaboration included three other statistical agencies and led to a more standardized set of measures across the agencies' data collections and target populations, which created the ability to look at nontraditional credentials from both the education and the labor force perspectives and to consider how they affect the scientific workforce distinct from other groups.[17]
- In meeting its responsibility to support the education data ecosystem by leading the Common Education Data Standards program, NCES ultimately helped states improve the quality and comparability of information they used to learn from one another, as well as those they were providing to the Department's EdFacts system and NCES's Common Core of Data.
- In order to provide students, academic leaders, policymakers, and labor analysts with an objective bridge between postsecondary education and workforce outcomes, the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) to Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) Crosswalk was created through an interagency collaboration between NCES and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). By transitioning from informal state-level mappings to a standardized national baseline, it provides an authoritative tool to evaluate federal program effectiveness, align curricula with labor demand, and make informed career and education decisions.
- Participating in the statistical system's build out of the required Standard Application Process under the Evidence Act, NCES helped create a comprehensive data discovery tool and inventory spanning all RSAs. This means that NCES data users now have an easier way to discover not only NCES data but those of other agencies as well.

NCES occupies a distinctive position at the intersection of two sets of critical infrastructure: the vertical education data system and the horizontal federal statistical system. It alone can systematically bring the assets of one system to inform and advance the

[15] As recommended in ASA's Modernizing the Federal Statistical System report (2026), OMB should complete the two data-sharing regulations required under Title III of the Evidence Act: one to make federal agency data accessible to statistical agencies by default with strong confidentiality protections ("presumption of access") and one to expand access for data users to confidential statistical agency data in secure environments. Without these regulations, federal statistical agencies will continue to struggle to combine existing federal or federally funded data to answer cross-cutting questions that no one agency can address alone. And in the absence of a sound regulatory framework for safe data access, persistent privacy concerns will continue to hinder researchers' ability to use these resources.

[16] Leveraging Federal Statistics to Strengthen Evidence-Based Decision-Making. *https://statspolicy.gov/assets/fcsm/files/docs/OMB_AP_LeveragingFedStats_fy2025.pdf*.

[17] See *https://nces.ed.gov/use-work/non-data-collection-program/gemena-interagency-working-group-expanded-measures-enrollment-and-attainment*.

other, and to use them both to meet its first responsibility to inform the condition and progress of education in the United States. Therefore, if NCES pursues its three sets of responsibilities in an integrative and comprehensive manner, it has the potential to significantly elevate its value to the nation and the public good.

UNDERSTANDING WHERE NCES IS TODAY

The agency responsible for U.S. education statistics has been remade (as well as renamed and relocated[18]) many times over the past 160 years as the national context has changed: new responsibilities were added, and the way it met its responsibilities changed to keep up.[19] NCES has repeatedly adapted to these shifting national demands—struggling at times, succeeding beyond expectations at others. Today it faces its most severe operational challenge yet while simultaneously being presented with its greatest opportunity to modernize. Navigating this historic moment requires a new vision and new strategy. Simply reassembling or reconstituting NCES as it was in its pre-2025 status quo would inevitably perpetuate the challenges that hampered its ability to adapt to new realities. And it would not promote the type of deep roots necessary for the type of institutional resilience[20] needed in an era where there are many more sources of education data today. To understand why this is so, it is necessary to briefly recap the history of NCES since 1984.

In 1984, the National Academy of Science (NAS) reviewed the work of NCES after a series of embarrassing "fiascos," including OMB halting the NCES Vocational Education Data System in 1983 for being "unreliable."[21] The NAS report concluded that the agency lacked statistical rigor, timeliness, and centralized quality control. The criticism was severe enough that the report suggested abolishing NCES if major reforms could not be implemented.[22] In response to the report, Congress passed the Hawkins-Stafford Act of 1988, establishing a legislative framework to rebuild the agency's credibility and independence, and NCES revamped its staff procedures, improved its data system capacity, upgraded its technology, and established rigorous statistical standards. Over the 1970s and 1980s, NCES started incorporating modern sampling practices and survey technologies to develop what were then "cutting edge" surveys and assessments, such as its longitudinal studies (of students through high school, college, and beyond) and the modern version of NAEP—both of which allowed NCES to answer questions that could not be answered then with state data (e.g., how do family background, socioeconomic status, and high school course sequences impact student achievement and affect college enrollment?).

However, while these practices and techniques succeeded in modernizing NCES, it was actually the establishment and enforcement of statistical standards put in place around these practices and techniques after the NAS report that burnished NCES's reputation as a leading statistical agency. At the same time, NCES also developed its own presence on the internet, pioneered the licensing of restricted data to researchers, and helped develop common education data standards. With all of this reform and innovation, NCES over the 1990s came to be regarded as a leading, modern, and efficient agency.

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[18] Since 1869, NCES was located in the Department of the Interior, the Federal Security Agency, and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare before being moved in 1980 to the newly formed cabinet-level Department of Education, and from there under the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) in 2002. See *https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/annualreports/topical-studies/retrospective*.

[19] For a brief overview of NCES's history, see *https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/annualreports/pdf/Fed_Ed_Data_Collection_Celebrating_150_Years.pdf*.

[20] Institutional resilience here refers to the capacity of a democratic institution and its leaders to withstand, adapt to, and recover from severe disruptions (e.g., economic crises, social upheaval, natural disasters, contested elections) without institutional breakdown or the abandonment of democratic norms. It encompasses institutional robustness, democratic durability, and public trust.

[21] See National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in Thomas C. Hunt, James C. Carper, Thomas J. Lasley II & C. Daniel Raisch (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent* (DOI: *https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412957403.n289*).

[22] National Research Council. (1986). *Creating a Center for Education Statistics: A Time for Action*, ed. Daniel B. Levine. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Thus it was perhaps not surprising that in the early 2000s, Congress hitched the federal government's education research wing, which was considered a "problem child," to the NCES wagon.[23] Officially, NCES was moved within the new Institute of Education Sciences (IES), but the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA) that relocated NCES institutionally made clear that the NCES Commissioner retained independent authority and was not subject to the same oversight by the IES Director as the heads of the research centers.[24] In addition, NCES staff size was almost five times that of the other three education research centers combined. Thus, in theory, it seemed like this reorganization would have a major impact on the research centers and little on NCES.

However, almost immediately IES asserted control over the NCES publication process, deciding that NCES could no longer release statistical products (e.g., reports) after its own review and approval process was completed but rather had to submit the products for a final review and approval by the new IES Office of Science. The NCES Commissioner challenged this change on the grounds that NCES was supposed to be an independent agency, but the Education Department's Office of General Counsel upheld IES's decision, and from that small beachhead, NCES steadily lost capacity and autonomy (especially during its recurring multiyear vacancies when NCES had no presidentially appointed NCES Commissioner).

Over time, the other three education centers in the new IES gained a portion of NCES's allotment of supervisory positions. The Office of the IES Director took over NCES's administrative staff, its web team, and its internet servers. In addition, IES's last Director personally came to handle all of the NCES Commissioner's budget and staffing requests to the Education Department and Congress; began asserting authority over which positions NCES could hire and what NCES could publish (after IES-level reviews); and reorganized IES such that only the IES front office could hire for certain positions (e.g., data scientists and communication specialists).[25]

By the time that the National Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM[26]) was asked to evaluate NCES generally and NAEP specifically in 2021, NCES's work had become ossified—that is, focused on meeting expectations for data collection and reporting using methods it had always used—out of the necessity to meet its ever-growing workload with reduced resources. It was not keeping pace with increasing public expectations for timely data, and its efforts to innovate and modernize

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[23] For details on how the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), the agency responsible for education research from 1980 to 2002, was regarded as a deeply troubled and inherently problematic agency, see the various publications of Maris A. Vinovskis, whose work was frequently cited for making the case that OERI was a structurally flawed entity in need of complete reform. For example, Maris A. Vinovskis, "The Federal Role in Educational Research and Development" (2000) in *Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2000*, 359-386. For examples of scholarship that used Vinovskis' work to argue for reforming OERI, see Feuer, M. J., Towne, L., & Shavelson, R. J. (2002). "Scientific culture and educational research," in Educational Researcher, 31(8), 4–14 [https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X031008], and National Research Council. (2002). *Scientific research in education*. R. J. Shavelson & L. Towne (Eds.), Committee on Scientific Principles for Education Research. National Academies Press [https://doi.org/10.17226/10236].

[24] ESRA places all commissioners "except the Commissioner for Education Statistics" under the Director's supervision and approval [Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, Pub. L. 107-279, §117(d), 116 Stat. 1953 (20 U.S.C. §9517(d))]. Besides this explicit exclusion of the NCES Commissioner from the Director's general supervisory and approval authority, ESRA gives the NCES Commissioner direct authority to carry out NCES duties through grants, contracts, cooperative agreements, and technical assistance [ibid.]. Yet, while ESRA exempted the NCES Commissioner from IES oversight by the IES Director, Elliott et al. (2023) point out that the 2002 legislation did diminish the professional autonomy of NCES. Prior to 2002, NCES had data collection authority in statute, which specified that no NCES data collection shall be subject to any review, coordination, or approval except by OMB (see Elliott et al., 2023). ESRA transferred such authority to the IES Director.

[25] For further reading on how ESRA diminished NCES's stature, technical autonomy, and agility due to ESRA, see Elliott et al. (2023). The authors document how ESRA reversed many of the Hawkins-Stafford provisions that made NCES an agile and fully accountable statistical agency and how ESRA made NCES susceptible to further diminution.

[26] In 2015, to avoid confusion and reflect the equal standing of all three national academy branches—Science (NAS), Engineering (NAE), and Medicine (NAM)—the overarching organization adopted the collective name National Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM).

were conservative, implemented only when they would not disrupt standard operations. These problems were documented by the NASEM report, *A Vision and Roadmap for Education Statistics* (2022), which offered over a dozen recommendations, intended to outline a bold blueprint to transform NCES into a leader within the 21st-century data ecosystem. Rather than relying on traditional methodologies or incremental process improvements, the panel called for NCES to embrace its role within the nation's education data ecosystem; see the possibilities for producing its data products in a broader way, including integrating administrative and alternative data sources; and working more closely with stakeholders to critically assess its work, including re-examining assumptions in its data frameworks. It also recognized that achieving this vision would require coordinated action, and hence it called for the Education Department, IES, and Congress to formally align agency staffing with its program scope, clarify legal authorities, and secure dedicated research and development funding to ensure national education data remain relevant, timely, and impactful.

Within the constraints of its reduced staff and budget, NCES was only able to enact the NASEM recommendations to a limited extent; thus, when the American Statistical Association in 2024 produced its first annual review of the health of each of the federal statistical agencies across the federal statistical system, it found NCES's situation acutely challenging. The ASA's 2024 report, *The Nation's Data at Risk*, found that federal statistics were increasingly at risk because many agencies lacked one or more of three critical supports: strong professional autonomy, strong parent-agency support, and sufficient budget and staffing resources. NCES suffered on all three counts, and, in particular, ASA's review showed that NCES was operating within one of the least sustainable staffing configurations in the FSS.[27]

These longstanding challenges were compounded in early 2025, when NCES was effectively dismantled: all executive leadership (including the presidentially appointed Commissioner with a six-year term meant to insulate the position from politics) and 97 percent of its staff were dismissed, and nearly $900 million—or about three-quarters of its contracts—were summarily canceled.[28] These cuts triggered outcry and litigation from federal employees, contractors, institutions of higher education, and others, but notably not from state governments. Their general silence underscored how little NCES was understood to directly affect state operations or decision-making capacity, at least in the short term. NCES was not in any state's critical path for producing education data; it did not collect or process data for states, it did not in the short run alter the workload of state staff, and it did not obviously or significantly offset costs that states now must bear. In short, the dismantling exposed perceived relevance for states and, therefore, the absence of one important aspect of institutional resilience. Thus reconstituting NCES in its pre-2025 status quo, with its former staff and contracts, would not address NCES's structural weaknesses or put it on a future path to meet its responsibilities fully. That requires a new vision for NCES and a strategy to realize that vision.

Many people expected such a vision when the Secretary of Education appointed a special advisor, Dr. Amber Northern, to evaluate IES and prepare a report of her findings. In February 2026, the Education Department issued Northern's report, Reimagining the Institute of Education Sciences. While the report did not offer a new vision for NCES, it does help confirm that there is a broad consensus (discussed further in the next section) that:

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[27] ASA found the NCES had one of the most extreme examples of federal statistical agencies's budget-to-staff ratios and exceptionally high ratios of contractors-to-employees: "[NCES and two other agencies] has their staffing line determined out of a parent agency's staffing line by a parent agency official/office, rather than by the statistical agency out of its own budget line. This arrangement means that, even if one of these agencies were to receive a budget increase, it could not use any of it to make hires but instead would have no option but to contract for needed services. It is not surprising, therefore, that NCES reported a ratio of FTE contractors to FTE employees ranging from 11:1 to 16:1 for FY 2021–FY 2023 and that NCSES reported this ratio in FY 2021 at 13:1, whereas four other agencies reported ratios of 0.50:1 or less. NCES and NCSES both use highly qualified contractors, but there is no obvious reason concerning the nature of their work as to why their ratios should be so much higher than those of other statistical agencies. Instead, this finding underscores that the agencies with exceptionally high ratios of contractors-to-employees are in that position because of actions of their parent agency and not necessarily because this is how they would choose to divide up their work if they had that discretion." Ibid. p. 83.

[28] Palmer, K. (2025, September 25). Gutted NCES Releases First Batch of Higher Ed Data. Inside Higher Ed. *https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty/research/2025/09/25/gutted-nces-releases-first-batch-higher-ed-data*.

- NCES's work is essential for the nation (it "provides indispensable education statistics and assessments for the country"),
- NCES's mission serves the public good rather than any particular administration, and its work depends on the autonomy, objectivity, and scientific integrity necessary to ensure public trust,
- NCES's "investment in states' data infrastructure … is key in supporting data-driven decision-making at the state and local levels," and
- NCES plays an important role in the U.S. FSS, as evidenced by citing the importance of collaborations like the Current Population Survey (CPS) with the Census Bureau.

The report also underscores the point that no other actor can perform these roles with the same authority or reach.[29]

Although the report made several tactical recommendations (e.g., that NCES should develop standardized data-sharing agreements with SEAs and local education agencies (LEAs); and conduct several types of reviews, including a content review of all existing surveys, in order to reduce the size of its data collection portfolio and to increase value to stakeholders), broad strategies for achieving a future state that is more efficient, agile, or responsive was not in its scope. Moreover, while it added a few staff to NCES in 2026, the Education Department has not as of summer 2026 indicated its plans in response to the report or otherwise addressed the reality that, with significantly reduced expertise at NCES, most of the agency's statistical collections and production, as well as the collaborative relationships NCES cultivated that supported other actors across the education data landscape, have come to a virtual if not complete stop.[30]

In addition, OMB has done little to address the fact that the Department is not fulfilling its requirement under the Trust Regulation to enable NCES to meet its responsibilities or that NCES's dismantling weakens the FSS as a whole.[31] Given these actions (or lack thereof), one might think there was little support for NCES and the work that it does, but that would be far from the truth, as we next discuss.

WHAT ASA HEARD FROM STAKEHOLDERS

Throughout the project, we heard fairly universal agreement (across the political spectrum and across education providers and consumers in a range of sectors) on two points. First, the nation needs, more than ever, a trusted public institution that can anchor standards, evaluate quality, and produce education-related statistics designed for the common good. Second, we heard that NCES's historical roles are unique and essential. These roles include:

(a) being a source for high-quality, unbiased, and comparable education statistics, and

(b) enabling the rest of the education data ecosystem to remain robust and function smoothly.

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[29] See the summary of the project's first roundtable: *https://www.amstat.org/docs/default-source/amstat-documents/roundtable1_summary.pdf* and the Northern report, page 15: *https://ies.ed.gov/ies/2026/02/reimagining-ies*.

[30] The near-cessation of NCES's ecosystem-supporting work and its partnership programs (in particular through SLDS grants) has received far less attention than the cancellation of well-known data collections, including its longitudinal studies. But it won't be long before the cracks in the infrastructure of the nation's education data ecosystem start to show. See *https://www.amstat.org/policy-and-advocacy/nces-study-and-project-tracker*.

[31] While NCES is an extreme example, all federal statistical agencies, and therefore the FSS as a whole, have been weakened by staff cuts, leadership dismissals, organizational dismantling, unprecedented budgetary spending constraints, and cross-cutting policy changes. As a result, the rest of the FSS is not well positioned to compensate for the diminished NCES capacity, despite the longer-term intention to be mutually supportive to increase overall system resilience. See *https://www.amstat.org/policy-and-advocacy/assessing-the-health-of-the-principal-federal-statistical-agencies*.

We also heard that NCES must continue to fulfill these roles now more than ever because the education data ecosystem has become more crowded and uneven. Many organizations now produce education-related data, but much of that information lacks the comparability, quality review, interoperability, and public accountability needed for high-stakes decision-making. In addition, we heard repeatedly that NCES's nationally representative longitudinal surveys fill a niche that no other entity does because they tell us not only "what" but "why." (The "what" tells us whether there is an issue that can and/or should be addressed with policy, for example, whether there are gaps in achievement related to the location of one's school, while the "why" can tell us the cause of the differences and what policies should address to resolve the concern.) Thus, NCES's capacity to be a steward of data in the ecosystem must be strengthened, given NCES's specific authority and placement, and that many states and others lack data capacity to do more.

As noted above, the Northern report reached strikingly similar conclusions based on hundreds of public comments that the Education Department received and on stakeholder listening sessions she conducted, most notably:

- Virtually everyone agrees that IES has an imperative, via NCES, to continue to collect critical information about schools, students, teachers, and education programs from early childhood through post-secondary education, adult education, and the workforce.
- The federal government currently provides the only mechanism for producing comparable, comprehensive, and publicly accessible data across all states and sectors (including the Nation's Report Card, NCES finance, IPEDS, and CCD datasets, which are among the most utilized data in the country).
- NCES investment in states' data infrastructure, through the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) program, is key in supporting data-driven decision-making at the state and local levels.
- In an era where evidence-based strategies are paramount, these data help identify trends, measure progress, highlight areas that need improvement, and enable those who run schools to get a greater return on investment for taxpayer dollars.

Despite this overwhelming confidence in NCES's role, we also heard broad agreement that the status quo before early 2025 was inadequate. Two points, in particular, were repeatedly made: (1) NCES must focus and sequence its work strategically rather than trying to sustain its traditional overextended portfolio of work to report on the many factors Congress requires to be part of the condition of education;[32] and (2) the resulting products must be more timely, more actionable, and easier for end users to access.[33] Supporters readily acknowledged that the need to prioritize is in part because of the extensive list of demographic elements and topics that Congress included in NCES's authorizing legislation combined with the growing complexity

[32] ESRA specifies that NCES must collect and report out data on a broad set of specific topics, including: (1) state and local education reform activities; (2) state and local early childhood school readiness activities; (3) student achievement in reading, mathematics, and science; (4) secondary school completions, dropouts, and adult literacy skills; (5) information on teaching practice; (6) educational instruction, the conditions of the education workplace, and the supply of and demand for teachers; (7) the incidence, frequency, seriousness, and nature of violence affecting students and school personnel; (8) the financing and management of education, including data on revenues and expenditures; (9) the social and economic status of children; (10) the existence and use of educational technology in elementary and secondary education schools; (11) access to early childhood programs; (12) the availability of before-school and after-school programs; (13) student participation in secondary and postsecondary vocational and technical education by specific program area; and (14) the existence and use of school libraries. These data must further be disaggregated by gender; race; ethnicity; socioeconomic status; limited English proficiency; mobility; disability; urban, rural, and suburban districts; and other population characteristics, "when such disaggregated information will facilitate educational and policy decision making." Source: *https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R43398.html*.

[33] Two other important points, not as widely recognized regarding the status quo, are that the context for research and data has changed, with two factors being key: the growth of other sources of data that can be drawn on, and the fact that people and institutions have become less and less willing to participate in surveys over time, which affects cost (e.g., forcing NCES to spend more to obtain sufficient responses for a valid study) and data quality (e.g., with lower response, data are less likely to be adequately representative).

of the education enterprise. They also recognized that NCES's in-house staffing levels pre-2025 were inadequate because of rigid, inefficient bureaucracy imposed by Congress and the administration that did not allow staffing levels to grow commensurate with funding,[34] effectively limiting the scope of what it could accomplish without structural reform. Relatedly, participants accepted that programmatic and across-the-board improvements to timeliness and accessibility were understood and desired by NCES, but their implementation was severely hampered by a staff barely sufficient to manage the agency's hundreds of survey-specific contracts and several thousand contractors (with none left to implement innovative ideas or address cross-cutting solutions), limited resources to work on them, and the increasingly challenging environment for conducting voluntary federal surveys.[35]

In addition, speaking to the pre-2025 status quo, stakeholders noted that NCES must restore and enhance its scientific and administrative capacity; champion the cause of rebuilding public trust in an era of deep national mistrust; improve its ability to use linked data and secondary data sources, supported by AI responsibly, with privacy protections built in from the start; and engage Congress and other data users more directly in setting priorities. We heard that in setting NCES's priorities, those activities that only NCES is able to perform should be given priority: i.e., producing comparable national statistics, conducting nationally representative surveys and longitudinal studies that are uniquely able to inform perspectives such as those of school staff[36] and life trajectories such as those of students and the factors influencing them, maintaining common standards, and providing ecosystem coordination.[37] Lastly, stakeholders called out the need for breaking down the siloed nature of education data and for NCES to take the lead on facilitating, building, and evaluating more intentional cross-domain datasets, such as to inform talent "pipelines" from education to the workforce, which is a national, state, and local priority.

In these discussions, the team made a point to engage individuals from the private sector and philanthropy in addition to the traditional actors in the education and statistical system ecosystems. The private sector plays a huge role as contractors to NCES, states, and others. Especially in the areas of education technology and artificial intelligence, we learned about significant locally focused private-sector investments that seem poised only to grow. These often are not tethered to any national or even statewide data infrastructures, and the team sees opportunity for greater coordination and resulting efficiencies by explicitly envisioning those actors as part of the ecosystem.

Similarly, we observed that philanthropy makes thousands of investments in education, with many having data implications, whether through technology, AI, measuring progress against the investments, or in other ways. In our roundtable with representatives of philanthropy, we heard enthusiasm for helping a future NCES become robust and respected, and for better coordinating investments. For that reason, the project team understands how important philanthropy is as a participant in future ecosystem configurations.

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[34] Elliott et al. (2023).

[35] From Modernizing the Federal Statistical System: A Roadmap for Action: "The 21st century has seen declines in survey response rates, declining statistical agency budgets in real terms, and new challenges to maintaining confidentiality and privacy from the advent of the internet. At the same time a myriad of data sources (administrative records, private-sector data, internet data) are potentially available for blending with federal survey data to improve the relevance, accuracy, timeliness, and granularity of important data series."

[36] See for example K-12 Education from the Perspectives of Education and Administrators, which explains the basic premise that NCES's surveys of school staff are used to collect data that are not available in any administrative data sources or that are best collected from a school staff perspective.

[37] We acknowledge that stakeholders identified value in continuing each major category of prior work, even as they called for prioritization. This reflects the fact that every survey and program had multiple constituencies. Later in the paper, we discuss how shifting from a survey-centric to a curation-centric model is a major strategy for modernizing. This approach can reduce the content and burden, and ultimately the number, of stand alone surveys, and is therefore a major prioritization tool.

As part of its project of engaging stakeholders, we also presented a range of models for how a renewed NCES could be organized better to fulfill its responsibilities.[38] The models each addressed an identified limitation of the pre-2025 status quo, especially related to timeliness, efficiency, trust, and declining response rates. For example, some models sought to increase the buy-in by states and others to ensure their continued participation in serving voluntarily as primary data sources. Models ranged from relatively modest reforms to more substantial changes in governance and operations in support of reporting on the condition of education, with implications for how it accomplishes the other two sets of responsibilities (sustaining the national education data ecosystem and capacity-building within the FSS). Across these options, there was a consistent set of key factors, and these options differed primarily in the answers to these key questions:

- who makes decisions and sets priorities;
- where technical capacity resides;
- how subject matter expertise is organized; what mechanisms support coordination, capacity-building, and technical assistance; and
- how functions for the common good remain sustainable even when they are not profitable.

These explorations surfaced many critical insights, including that any shifts in decision-making, governance, and data collection responsibility, correspondingly require capacity at NCES, states, and other ecosystem members to play their adapted role. For example, in even the most modest option, a longstanding forum—currently dormant—would require reconstitution and well-defined processes that permit states and others to productively and promptly provide increased input on the content of NCES data collections. In the more significantly different models, states might require additional entities and resources to collect and curate additional data, and NCES would require new methods and approaches for acquiring and curating data to create national statistical products. In the models that are most different from the processes that were NCES's status quo, states and others could take on significant new responsibilities, freeing up NCES to conduct fewer surveys or other tasks itself (as many have indicated is necessary) but also requiring corresponding growth in capacity for the other actors.

Regardless of the model pursued, several guiding principles exist:

- States and other actors should play a larger role in shaping priorities in order to increase buy-in, even though the federal role remains essential for comparability, continuity, and stewardship.
- Capacity must be developed not only within NCES but across the nation's data ecosystem, including around data governance, privacy, linkages, and innovation.
- Philanthropy and other private investments and technical support should support the ecosystem with increased coordination, likely by being engaged with pre-existing and new partnership organizations.
- Expanded outsourcing of public responsibilities to contribute to the public good should remain tied to institutions and governance arrangements that protect the public interest.

Even under the most decentralized scenario, NCES retains a critical role. In the short to medium term especially, the nation needs a lead federal office with authority and capacity to coordinate the ecosystem, collect key data, produce official national statistics, lead and collaborate on meeting the nation's ever-changing education data needs, and conduct large-scale longitudinal studies.

[38] For a complete report on these models, see Chapman and Provasnik (2026): *https://www.amstat.org/docs/default-source/amstat-documents/modernizing-the-federal-statistical-system/chapmanprovasnikoverview.pdf*.

VISION AND STRATEGY TO REMAKE NCES AND ADDRESS WHAT WAS HEARD

Given the broad consensus across the ASA conversations with key stakeholders and the Education Department's solicited public comments, it seems evident that the nation wants even more timely and accessible education data for a wide variety of uses. Likewise, it seems clear that while the *status quo ante* is no longer adequate, NCES's role and unique position to perform work that no other entity can do remain vital. Such work includes producing objective national education statistics, developing and being a steward of common data standards, conducting or facilitating nationally representative longitudinal studies, fostering a healthy education data ecosystem that can serve the common good, and fulfilling its responsibilities within the FSS, especially to promote better data infrastructures and cross-domain data analysis.

However, given that:

> (a) neither the Education Department nor IES have addressed the question of how the nation's data needs can be met, and how NCES can fulfill its responsibilities with a skeleton staff, and that even
>
> (b) reconstituting NCES with its former staff and contracts would not address the Center's institutional challenges and structural weaknesses,

a widely accepted vision for NCES's future and a strategy to realize that vision are critical. Further, that vision must be embraced and funded by Congress.

Vision

It is worth noting that what we heard regarding possible visions for NCES tracked, by and large, with the visions of national statistical offices (NSOs) around the world. For example, in an informal survey of vision statements among Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country NSOs, we saw themes of:

- publicly meaningful future outcomes, such as bettering lives, innovation in society, and supporting a strong democracy;
- the common good, including informing public and private decision-making, and leading nationally or internationally in providing, promoting, and sustaining high-quality data and infrastructure;
- unleashing the power of data to accomplish these outcomes, which includes curation activities such as turning data into useful information by a variety of activities in addition to fielding surveys; and
- the statistical agency as objective, trusted, respected, and relevant to decision-making and public debate.

The United States has both diverse and decentralized education and statistical systems. Therefore, we situate a recast vision for NCES in that context.

Vision

> We envision a future in which states, schools, communities, and other stakeholders have access to relevant, timely, and objective statistics to inform decisions and policies in support of improving the condition and progress of education in the United States.
>
> Achieving that future requires a strengthened, revitalized National Center for Education Statistics that anchors and enables a healthy national education data ecosystem, partners seamlessly with states to improve education data, and is respected for improving decision-making and debate about education in the United States.

This vision rests on the following key ideas:

1. *NCES leadership is needed* at the center of the nation's vast, dynamic, and decentralized data ecosystem in order to ensure the nation's education data ecosystem remains healthy and a public good.
2. NCES must (working with states and other federal agencies) cultivate the data environment and national infrastructure if it is to provide relevant, objective, and timely statistics on the nation's most pressing education issues. Thus sustaining a *healthy national education data ecosystem* is at the heart of this vision.
3. For NCES to have greater institutional resilience and ensure the relevancy of its work, NCES needs to *partner and support* states in their work.
4. Recognition is a precursor to trust and respect is an essential ingredient to sustain trust. In the past, NCES's work was largely unheralded and unknown, but the results of that work (i.e., its data) were preeminent because there were few other sources. Today in a world where information of varying quality emanates from many places, NCES needs to be known as the source for data that is trusted absolutely because it is produced outside of political considerations and bias.
5. NCES seeks to *improve decision-making and debate* by providing timely, high-quality, objective, and trusted data that policymakers, education leaders, researchers, and the general public can use to evaluate programs, identify challenges, develop and test hypotheses and potential solutions, or just make informed educational choices.
6. The vast education ecosystem in the United States underscores the broad nature of NCES's role, which is to *provide education data for every level and type of education and the context in which it occurs*.

Strategy

Achieving any vision requires a strategy, and the preponderance of our work informs this topic. ASA stakeholder conversations clarified the problems with trying to "rebuild" NCES while keeping each responsibility in isolation from one another. For example, one could focus solely on NCES's responsibilities as a data collector and disseminator and decide that NCES should pursue fewer topics, less depth, and/or fewer data collections. Yet, while the specific set of topics that NCES covers needs updating and its data collections should be streamlined, this approach has serious drawbacks. Principally, NCES and the country would miss once-in-generation opportunities to leverage the education data ecosystem and statistical communities to efficiently meet education data needs, and constrains NCES's ability to meet its three sets of statutory responsibilities, creating an inefficient cycle that bears a strong resemblance to the unsustainable pre-2025 status quo.

More holistically, one could remake NCES based on the 2022 NASEM report recommendations, which envisioned NCES not as primarily a data collector and disseminator but as a leader of the nation's education data ecosystem, seeing the possibilities for producing its data products in a broader way (that does not necessarily require NCES to be the primary data collector), and working more closely with stakeholders to critically assess what is most needed and curate accordingly the data in the ecosystem. This path would emphasize NCES's first two purposes, but it does not directly engage its third set of responsibilities, meet its responsibilities under the Evidence Act, or take advantage of the Act's new possible synergies within the FSS.

A third way is to remake NCES by expanding on the second approach while accomplishing all three purposes in a strategic way so that they reinforce each other. This approach takes advantage of the fact that NCES occupies a unique position at the intersection of the education data ecosystem and the FSS and can thus carry out its three sets of responsibilities in a much more fully integrated way than it has. This would allow NCES to achieve more within its available resources. This is to say that by improving the quality of data in the ecosystem and curating data with key stakeholders (especially, the states and institutions of higher education), NCES is improving the inputs for its reporting and reducing its reliance on resource-intensive surveys.

Likewise, by growing the role of the Statistical Official and its relationships with other agencies in the FSS, the country could benefit from NCES's access to other federal data and federal statistical solutions to challenges, sharing infrastructure and

innovation costs, and from cooperative endeavors to address common statistical challenges, including lack of capacity for R&D. Fundamentally, creating a stronger education data ecosystem and a stronger, more seamless statistical system allows NCES to much more readily modernize how it meets its responsibility to report on the condition and progress of education: namely, by shifting from a survey-centric model to a curation-centric one. This approach is consistent with ASA's recent report on modernizing the federal statistical system as a whole, which concludes that only by becoming more interoperable will the RSAs have capacity and support to modernize, continuously innovate, and meet current and emerging data needs effectively.

This last approach is what we advocate in this report. Not only is NCES legally obligated to meet all three sets of responsibilities (each of which is important), but NCES is unlikely to have the resources to meet all three separately. Therefore, addressing the three as mutually supportive, with multiple opportunities for efficiencies and improved data, is in effect the most pragmatic and principled way to be successful.

To state succinctly a strategy for the future within which NCES follows this third path, we offer the following:

Strategy

NCES can realize this vision by curating the nation's data with:

- the full support of federal leaders entrusted with enabling, facilitating, and supporting NCES in carrying out its responsibilities, including to ensure relevant, timely, and objective statistics for the nation;
- states and other partners in order to serve the needs of education decision-makers at every level with appropriate data security, confidentiality, and privacy protections;
- the federal statistical system to improve the nation's statistical infrastructure and address needs that no single agency can address alone; and
- modernized methods, structures, and organizational capacity to fulfill its responsibilities in tandem.

To remake NCES, leadership must prioritize its role as a strategic coordinator within the broader decentralized data ecosystem, elevating this responsibility to the same level as its responsibility to monitor and report on the condition of education. Because success depends on active collaboration with diverse stakeholders, these partnerships must be carefully managed so that they reinforce, rather than dilute, the agency's public mandate to provide trustworthy education data as a common good.

This strategy rests on the following key ideas:

1. *Curating* is NCES's key activity, which at its heart entails identifying, selecting, and accessing already-existing data when possible and designing data collections complements to already-existing data when necessary; evaluating those data; and enhancing their usefulness (e.g., by contextualizing them, linking and organizing them, or linking/aligning them with data from other sources). Centering this strategy on curation (rather than on data collection) is intended to underscore several critical points that have emerged repeatedly through this project:
    a. The pre-2025 status quo is inadequate because NCES's portfolio was outsized for its capabilities and some duplication was needed due to uneven quality and availability of subnational data for national purposes.
    b. The nation's data ecosystem needs data standards, documentation, and governance, and leadership to ensure quality and comparability, and those efforts can help both subnational and national data needs.
    c. Fully integrating NCES's leadership in reporting on the condition and progress of education and its leadership in both the education data ecosystem and the statistical system should more fully align data sources of sufficient quality with data needs, streamlining remaining data collections and thereby reducing burden on states, institutions of higher education, and others.

2. NCES cannot succeed without the *full support of federal leaders* because it relies on its parent agency, the federal statistical system, OMB, and Congress to be able to fulfill its responsibilities.
3. To fulfill its responsibilities, NCES must curate in *collaboration with states and other partners* (including local education agencies, Tribal nations and associations, institutions of higher education, federal agencies, researchers, nonprofit organizations, private-sector organizations, and philanthropies) with appropriate data security, confidentiality, and privacy protections. Only through such collaboration with those that use and interpret education data can NCES understand their information needs and curate data appropriate to meet them.
4. NCES's ability to curate data improves by orders of magnitude from working with other federal statistical agencies to strengthen the nation's data infrastructure, expand data-sharing within existing legal authorities, and develop shared systems that support projects such as linking data across agencies and conducting long-term studies.

These strategy elements are intended to reinforce NCES's public-facing purpose: ensuring that the nation has trustworthy education statistics, strong statistical and data practices, and durable institutional stewardship for education data as a common good.

ADVANCING THE VISION AND STRATEGY—STARTING POINT FOR A ROADMAP

We share this report to invite others to review, improve, and, ultimately, embrace the vision and strategy for NCES—along the way building a national community that can advance the vision and strategy. Based on responses to the vision and strategy, the project team will then engage the community to build consensus on the specific content of a roadmap, with concrete steps for multiple relevant audiences, to realize this vision and implement the strategy.

Although the specific contents of a roadmap are yet to be developed, several things are already clear. First, a roadmap will need to address identified practical, structural, and policy problems; this will in turn enable progress toward the vision. Second, actions by entities beyond NCES are needed. Third, NCES will need more internal capacity restored before it can take any significant steps toward this vision. Here are some of the major problems that must be addressed and the needed outcomes to which a roadmap should lead:

Governmental Reforms and Actions

- **Trusted and transparent data stewardship.**
  Public trust in federal statistics has been hovering around 50–55% for the past 14 months.[39] Longstanding research demonstrates that the public often has difficulty distinguishing federal statistical agency actions and statistical products from those of other government agencies and even non-federal sources.[40] As a result, near-record-low amounts of trust in public institutions today[41] likely affects NCES as much as any other agency. This

[39] This estimate is from data collected from NORC at the University of Chicago's AmeriSpeak panel as part of the ASA Federal Statistics Health project.

[40] Childs, J.H., S. Willson, S.W. Martinez, L. Rasmussen, and M. Wroblewski. 2012. "Development of the Federal Statistical System Public Opinion Survey." In *JSM Proceedings, Survey Research Methods Section*. Alexandria, VA: American Statistical Association, *https://bit.ly/3UnSUKx*.

[41] *https://news.gallup.com/poll/712436/confidence-institutions-remains-near-time-low.aspx* and https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2025/12/04/public-trust-in-government-1958-2025.

includes trust in upholding privacy and confidentiality promises. For more specialized education audiences, departmental dismantling efforts have likely weakened trust in NCES's ability to meet its responsibilities specifically. Implementing the Trust Regulation is a significant way for the department to support trust-building, as discussed in the next bullet. The stakeholder engagement and capacity rebuilding efforts below also will be critical opportunities for NCES to rebuild trust as well.

- **Implemented "Trust Regulation" and removal of longstanding bureaucratic barriers.**
  In part to accomplish the alignment in the previous bullet, NCES needs the Department to make a good faith effort to implement the Trust Regulation as an operational tool for strengthening NCES's ability to meet its responsibilities. That effort should begin with the Inspector General's assessment of progress implementing the Trust Regulation[42] and extend to practical reforms in administration, technology, and governance. Given the Department's restructuring and continuing fluidity, this is an opportune moment to remove unnecessary layers, reduce delays, and give NCES the authority and flexibility needed to align its operations with its statutory responsibilities.

- **Aligned executive branch responsibility, authority, and incentives.**
  NCES has enormous statutory responsibility under the three major laws governing its work, yet authority over rulemaking, staffing, budgeting and other essential inputs has largely remained with OMB, the Department, and IES. Historically, those entities, especially the Department, have not shared responsibility, accountability, or incentives for ensuring that NCES has what it needs to be successful. Evidence Act implementation should change that by requiring OMB, the Department, and IES to "enable, support, and facilitate" NCES in carrying out its responsibilities. Because the implementation remains nascent and incentives for full compliance are still weak, we see value in working with stakeholders to identify and promote incentives that align the interests of these parties in a manner that strengthens NCES's ability to uphold each set of responsibilities, as that would greatly enable the implementation of the roadmap.

- **Strengthened departmental data governance and management structures.**
  The Department needs management structures that allow the Commissioner to guide the Department's broader statistical and evidence-building practices, in concert with the Chief Data Officer and other relevant officials. This would better position NCES to support departmental evidence needs and ensure that administrative and program data can serve both operational and statistical purposes, including to improve NCES processes and products. It would also embed statistical standards and strong practices earlier in departmental decision-making processes.

- **Strengthened ties between NCES and the broader federal statistical system.**
  NCES needs active working relationships with OMB and the rest of theFSS for two reasons. First, to take advantage of resources to help it rebuild, beginning with those of the National Secure Data Service (NSDS) and other shared system initiatives. These relationships should focus on practical ways for NCES to benefit from NSDS and other statistical agency AI tools, data curation methods, and secure linkage infrastructure. Early collaboration would allow NCES both to shape and to benefit from common federal investments in statistical modernization. Second, to identify ways to leverage and enhance education and workforce efforts that other statistical agencies have independently developed, such as the Census' Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO), the IRS's Statistics of Income Division on the College Scorecard, and the BLS's talent pipeline measurement.

- **Issued regulations that enable privacy protecting federal data sharing.**
  As recommended in ASA's Modernizing the Federal Statistical System report, OMB should complete the two data-sharing regulations required under Title III of the Evidence Act: one to make federal agency data accessible to

[42] The inspector general (IG) of each parent agency is responsible for conducting compliance reviews to determine if the parent agency is complying with Trust Regulation requirements and if the RSA has sufficient resources to carry out the four fundamental responsibilities. The initial compliance review must be conducted on or after December 10, 2026, and thereafter at least once every three years.

statistical agencies by default with strong confidentiality protections ("presumption of access") and one to expand access for data users to confidential statistical agency data in secure environments. Without these regulations, federal statistical agencies will continue to struggle to combine existing federal or federally funded data to answer cross-cutting questions that no one agency can address alone. And in the absence of a sound regulatory framework for safe data access, persistent privacy concerns will continue to hinder researchers' ability to use these resources.

This set of problems and needed outcomes are not exhaustive, and much work remains to identify all the critical items to include in a roadmap. (Examples of important topics still to explore that we did not include yet are consideration of moving NCES out of IES and lifting the so-called student unit record ban that legally inhibits federal government access to individual-level student data.) We look forward to hearing other ideas for essential problems, outcomes, and steps to addressing them as we build a roadmap in the coming months.

Stakeholder and Statistical System Engagement

- **Deepened engagement with SEAs and other key stakeholders on this vision and strategy**. NCES will require significant engagement with SEAs, LEAs, Tribal nations, and institutions of higher education in direct discussion of how a re-envisioned NCES can both reduce burden and better meet their information needs in order to strengthen relationships, renew its leadership in the ecosystem, and to pursue an enhanced curation strategy. These conversations should focus on practical benefits, including fewer obstacles, more useful data, and stronger support for local and state decision-making. Building this broader base of understanding and support is also important to strengthening NCES's long-term institutional resilience and public value.
- **Engagement with federal statistical innovation.**
  NCES will require staff expertise and organizational flexibility to participate fully in the federal statistical system's shared innovation efforts, particularly around AI, data curation, secure access, and research and development. Engagement of this kind would help NCES shape common tools and standards while ensuring that education data are fully represented in system-wide modernization efforts. It would also reduce the risk that NCES operations are captured by contractors and remain isolated from advances being developed elsewhere in statistical methodologies and practices.

NCES Internal Structural and Capacity-Building Needs

- **Redesigned internal structures to improve coordination across programs and data assets.**
  NCES will need to restructure its internal organization and put in place written agreements (e.g., Memorandum of Understanding [MOU], Memorandum of Agreement [MOA], service agreements) to strengthen coordination across its major programs, especially between Common Education Data Standards (CEDS), SLDS, and federal studies collecting education-related information within NCES, IES, the Department, and beyond. The goal should be greater comparability across data collections, less redundancy, and improved capacity for direct linkages between NCES and federal data on the one hand and data from SEAs, LEAs, and institutions on the other. Better internal coordination is essential to making NCES's education-specific, departmental, and FSSm roles mutually reinforcing.
- **Restored and expanded internal capacity.**
  NCES will require significantly more internal capacity than it currently has to realize this vision and strategy. Although a full assessment of NCES's current capacity is difficult to ascertain, it is clear that NCES will need build internal capacity for do the following:
    - **Lead and implement the vision.**
      NCES needs internal capacity to lead the creation and implementation of this strategy and roadmap, ideally informed by stakeholder response to this report. That requires the authority and funding to not only replace lost expertise in educational content, statistics, and research so that NCES can function

fully as the nation's recognized statistical agency for education but also to expand capacity, as further elaborated in the following points. It also requires institutional redesign so that all three sets of NCES responsibilities are integrated across its work rather than treated as separate or competing functions.

- **Modernize the data portfolio.**
  NCES needs sufficient staffing to modernize its data portfolio, especially through new data science capacity. This includes the ability to build AI-supported systems that can identify, consolidate, evaluate, protect, and integrate public, restricted-access, and confidential education-related data from across the country. It also includes capacity to improve user experience accessing and using NCES data and to provide users with analysis and clear guidance about data quality and appropriate interpretation—for example, whether a particular source offers a preliminary signal, a rough approximation, or a reliable measure. Additional capacity is also needed to expand secure restricted-use access and to support tiered data releases that provide timely preliminary estimates followed by systematic revisions as fuller information becomes available.

- **Modernize assessments, especially NAEP.**
  NCES also needs staff capacity to modernize NAEP development and production. This includes data scientists and technical experts who can advance stalled progress on automated and AI-assisted item generation, automated scoring and diagnostic analysis, and expand such automation into other areas as well as systems that would allow improved function of NAEP and the Nation's Report Card toward more dynamic structures and more timely reporting. Without this internal capacity, modernization of the nation's flagship assessment will remain slow and fragmented.

- **Support deeper collaboration with states and institutions.**
  NCES needs staff dedicated to designing and sustaining operating models centered on continuous working collaboration with its primary stakeholders, especially SEAs and institutions of higher education. These roles should go beyond episodic consultation and instead support long-term partnerships focused on shared priorities, data quality, burden reduction, and practical use. A more collaborative operating model would strengthen both the relevance of NCES's work and the resilience of its national role.

Because even this partial list of needed outcomes to address NCES's challenges to realizing the proposed vision and strategy is extensive, and because NCES cannot address any of them alone, we envision ASA and other stakeholders playing an important role in: (a) building consensus around priorities and options for NCES's future, and (b) engaging congressional, OMB, and Departmental leaders to inform, motivate, and support forward progress toward the vision of a healthy national education data ecosystem cultivated by NCES. At the same time, the following groups can play important roles, as outlined below.

Call to Action

For the broader stakeholder community

To build the broadest possible community of informed and aligned stakeholders to engage NCES, Congress, and the administration in remaking NCES, we call on the broad education and statistical communities to commit to sustained engagement with states, districts, researchers, philanthropy, and private actors in order to:

- Develop consensus around a vision and strategy for NCES by engaging with this report and us in the months ahead.
- Bring additional voices into the conversation about NCES's future.
- Help define a realistic roadmap for reforming NCES.

- Communicate more clearly the benefits stakeholders already derive from NCES, and the additional benefits that they could derive from addressing its current and prior challenges and from otherwise strengthening the agency.
- Coordinate advocacy for an institution capable of serving the common good over the long term.
- Submit ideas and feedback on this project using this form.

For Congress

We call on Congress to engage with the stakeholder community in evolving and advancing this vision and strategy for rebuilding NCES, and to prepare now to respond once a roadmap for implementation emerges from that process. We also call on Congress to:

- Exercise vigorous oversight of NCES to:
  - Empower NCES through Department implementation of the Evidence Act's Trust Regulation, including the administrative and organizational backing NCES needs to rebuild public trust and re-engage stakeholders, including Congress.
  - Protect the professional autonomy and administrative capacity NCES needs to function as a credible statistical institution.
  - Enable NCES through the use of the Evidence Act regulations to fulfill its statutory responsibilities more efficiently, including by leveraging other federal data and using the best available data privacy tools.
  - Require the appointment of a well-qualified and empowered Commissioner for the next full term.
- Provide NCES sufficient resources to carry out its legally required responsibilities.
- Begin the process of modernizing NCES's authorizing statute to:
  - harmonize its multiple responsibilities and address the corresponding organizational implications,[43] and
  - enable modern, privacy-protected access to data held by states and institutions given the enormous potential burden and cost reductions, advances in privacy-enhancing techniques, and demonstrated success of other federal statistical agency use of state data for generating federal statistics.[44]

For the Administration

We call on the administration, through OMB, to take steps to launch a modernization effort for the Federal Statistical System, as recommended in the report Modernizing the Federal Statistical System by ASA's team of the same name. This effort would help NCES and the rest of the FSS operate more efficiently and effectively than it can today. We call upon key officials, including the Chief Statistician of the United States, to engage with stakeholders and with our report to help shape a vision and strategy for a remade NCES.

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[43] The principal governing legislation for NCES are ESRA, the Evidence Act, and the Geospatial Act. Modernizing NCES's governing legislation requires more than what is commonly referred to as "reauthorizing ESRA" because ESRA reauthorizations over the past 15 years have begun with a draft bill from the early 2000s before NCES gained its additional statutory responsibilities laid out in this paper. For details on this bill, see Elliott et al. (2023).

[44] Even with Evidence Act data access regulations in place, NCES will continue to face access barriers unprecedented within the statistical system to individual-level data held by states, districts, and institutions of higher education. Past discussions about removing the legal ban on such records has raised privacy concerns, and ASA appreciates the sensitivity of the topic still in 2026, even as it recognizes significant potential, progress, and precedent that could inform congressional consideration today.

For the Department of Education

Even in this transitional period, we call on NCES's parent department to implement the Evidence Act's Trust Regulation. Doing so would give NCES the administrative and organizational support needed to begin to rebuild public trust and demonstrates commitment to its requirement for relevance, such as by re-engaging stakeholders, including those responsible for education policy and program administration, in order to prioritize its portfolio effectively. We also call on the Department to engage the community in shaping a vision and strategy for rebuilding NCES, drawing both on the ASA report and Dr. Northern's report.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, ASA calls on the broad range of education practitioners, policymakers, data and evidence experts, and philanthropic funders to join us in improving and advancing a vision and strategy for rebuilding NCES into the modern education statistics agency that the country clearly needs. We call on Congress to join this effort now, to engage in this ideation process and to vigorously oversee and protect NCES. We believe such actions will not only permit NCES to report on the condition and progress of education for years to come but to do so while strengthening the nation's education data infrastructure and growing the nation's capacity to answer priority questions about education and the many areas it touches.

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