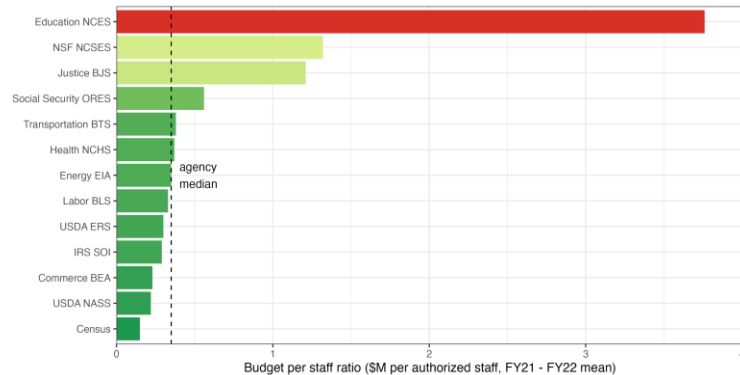


Fix the Staffing Shortage at the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Fiscal Year 2026 Appropriations Request

What is NCES? Located within the Department of Education’s (DoEd) Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the National Center for Education Statistics is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education. The NCES helps federal and state policymakers better understand the state of education in the U.S., and provides the data that drives solutions for improving the quality of education.

NCES Staffing Shortages: NCES is severely understaffed with fewer than 100 employees for an agency with an annual budget of \$306 million. For comparison, NCES’ budget to staff ratio is 10 times the median of all federal statistics agencies as shown in embedded chart. The myriad impacts of the staffing shortage are detailed below.



The staffing constraints are due largely to how staffing budgets are allocated. NCES’ budget comes from three funding lines in the annual Labor-Health and Human Services (HHS)-Education Appropriations Act: (1) statistics; (2) assessment (neither of which can be used for salaries); and (3) a portion of IES Program Administration allocated to NCES, with IES making the decision about NCES employee level. See the IES FY23 budget table below.

For more information, please see this [2021 discussion of experts](#),¹ the 2022 National Academies report, *A Vision and Roadmap for Education Statistics*², and the following:

- Auerbach, J. et al (2024). [The Nation’s Data at Risk: Meeting America’s Information Needs for the 21st Century](#).
- Elliott, E. et al (2023). [Bolstering Education Statistics to Serve the Nation](#).

DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2023

(Amounts in thousands)

	FY 2022 Enacted	FY 2023 Request	Final Bill	Final Bill vs Enacted	Final Bill vs Request
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES (IES)					
Research, Development and Dissemination.....	204,877	197,877	245,000	+40,123	+47,123
Statistics.....	111,500	111,500	121,500	+10,000	+10,000
Regional Educational Laboratories.....	58,733	57,022	58,733	---	+1,711
Research in Special Education.....	60,255	58,500	64,255	+4,000	+5,755
Special Education Studies and Evaluations.....	13,318	11,318	13,318	---	+2,000
Statewide Data Systems.....	33,500	33,500	38,500	+5,000	+5,000
Assessment:					
National Assessment.....	180,000	185,000	185,000	+5,000	---
National Assessment Governing Board.....	7,745	7,799	7,799	+54	---
Subtotal, Assessment.....	187,745	192,799	192,799	+5,054	---
Program Administration.....	67,093	---	73,500	+6,407	+73,500
Total, Institute of Education Sciences.....	737,021	662,516	807,605	+70,584	+145,089

¹ *State of the Education Data Infrastructure: What Three Experts Have to Say About the National Center for Education Statistics*, September, 2021, *Amstat News*.

² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2022. *A Vision and Roadmap for Education Statistics*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26392>.

FY26 Request: Allow NCES to use its budget for salaries and expenses by 1) transferring the portion of the IES Program Administration funding currently used for statistics and assessment to each of the respective accounts (see table); and 2) specifying that statistics and assessment funding may be used for salaries and expenses, as exemplified by the appropriations language and approach, for example, for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) or the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). Such a transfer of funding from the IES Program Administration funding to the statistics and assessment lines is an extension of Congress’s actions in FY22 appropriations when it created the IES Program Administration line by transferring the portion of the department-wide “Salaries and Expenses” line that was allocated to IES.

Proposed Bill Language, Institute of Education Sciences: *Provided further*, that funds for Statistics and Assessment available to carry out Part C of the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 and 20 U.S. Code § 9622 may be used for salaries and expenses.

Proposed Report Language: *Administrative Expenses.*—The committee provides a zero-cost realignment of the NCES portions of the IES Program Administration to the IES Statistics and Assessment lines and designates that those lines may be used for salaries and expenses in order to allow it to operate more fully as an independent federal statistical agency and to provide it more nimbleness to provide relevant education statistics in a timely manner.

Impact of NCES Staffing Shortages: NCES’ staff shortage impedes the agency’s effective and efficient operations in many ways. It forces the agency to rely heavily on external contractors, which overall is more expensive than an expert staff workforce. The 2021 Contractor to FTE ratio was 9:1 (95 staff FTEs, 875 FTE contractors). This reliance on contractors impedes the agency’s ability to be nimble and easily reallocate staff to immediate needs (as demonstrated at the onset of the pandemic). This shortage also forced the agency to cut programs,³ resulting in a loss of institutional memory and a diminishment of NCES’s standing as an independent federal statistical agency. As an example, NCES is not allowed to use Statistics and Assessment line funding to hire staff but it can contract with the US Census Bureau who can use the contract funding to hire permanent staff.



Benefits of this FY26 Request:

- Use taxpayer money more efficiently and effectively
- Help NCES build internal capacity and staff expertise
- Provide more management flexibility to optimize operations
- Reinforce NCES’s status as a principle federal statistical agency

³ [Understaffing threatens work at key U.S. education statistics agency, experts say](#), Valerie Strauss, March 31, 2020, *The Washington Post*