

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the Department of Education's (ED's) Institute of Education Sciences (IES) is required by Congress to provide objective, reliable, and trustworthy statistics about the condition of education through administrative data collections, statistical surveys, longitudinal studies, and assessments. Founded in 1867, NCES is the second oldest and third largest in budget among the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB's) 13 principal federal statistical agencies. The NCES's combined statistics and assessment budget lines account for about \$300 million annually. The NCES is authorized through the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA), which has been due for reauthorization for many years. Its work covers a wide spectrum of topics, including the following:

- The Nation's Report Card (congressionally mandated)
- The Condition of Education Report (congressionally mandated)
- Digest of Education Statistics
- Grants, services, resources to states for development of statewide longitudinal data systems
- Longitudinal studies tracing experiences of early childhood students, secondary students and transition to post high school, and college and beyond experiences
- International school practices, education trends, assessment outcomes, governmental policies
- Higher education finances, students, faculty, degrees, transcripts
- Elementary and secondary finances, school universe, enrollments, graduates, staffing, private schools
- International school practices, education trends, assessment outcomes, governmental policies
- Breakouts by subpopulations for most of the above information

**The following is based on publicly available information, information from former agency leadership, and select information from our questionnaire.

STRENGTH OF NCES'S SUPPORT†

Autonomy: Weak. NCES's professional autonomy is among the weakest for the 13 principal federal statistical agencies. Besides not having protections in statute, its authorizing legislation gives or cedes such authorities as data collection and hiring to IES.

Staffing level: Weak. Compared with other federal statistical agencies, NCES staffing level is not commensurate with its budget. Including estimated staffing amounts, its budget-to-staff ratio is roughly 10 times the median of the other federal statistical agencies. Instead NCES overly relies on contract staff, which greatly restricts NCES's flexibility in assigning both staff and contractors where needed.

Parent agency: Weak. Challenging aspects are lack of budget request support and lags in hiring and IT due to reliance on the Department of Education (ED) or its contractors for shared services. IES's actions (whether benign or not) have had a tendency to slow NCES products and meddle with NCES statistical operations in ways inconsistent with the Evidence Act but authorized in the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) of 2002. The hiring challenges have extended to IES rescinding hires not completed by the fiscal year's end and using the funds for other purposes. IES has also required NCES to fund IES initiatives without meaningful input (e.g., two 2022 National Academies' reports, Digital Modernization.) Further, there is little public evidence of ED engaging NCES to inform the department's policies and initiatives or tap the Commissioner as the department's Statistical Official. Nor does ED involve NCES leadership in meetings with appropriators or allow direct contact of Hill staff with NCES.

† See Supporting Materials F for an explanation of the support ratings.

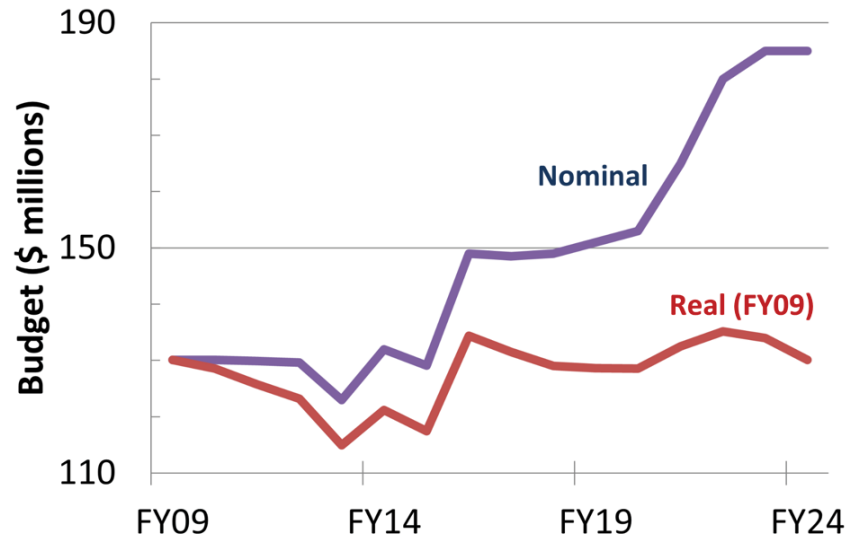
AGENCY FAST FACTS

Budget inputs and FY24 level

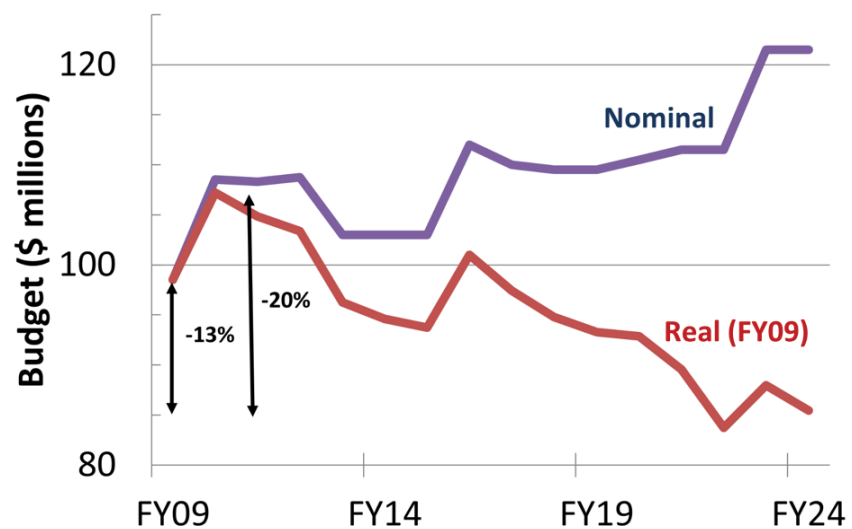
1. NCES has two appropriations lines that totaled \$306 million in FY 2024
 - a. Statistics: \$121.5 million
 - b. Assessment: \$185 million
2. NCES is responsible for the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems, funding for which was \$38.5 million in FY 2023.
3. NCES staffing is included in the support NCES receives from the IES program administration line, which was expected to be \$43 million for FY 2024.

Funding history,
inflation adjusted

NCES: Assessment line



NCES: Statistics line



Appointment of
head & layers down
in ED org chart

The NCES Commissioner is presidentially appointed. Senate confirmation of the presidential nomination was removed in 2012. NCES is one of two federal statistical agencies with such an appointment.

Two: The NCES commissioner reports to the IES director, who reports to the Secretary of Education.

<p>Miscellaneous</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → NCES administers approximately 30 surveys on its own and four in collaboration with state and federal agencies. It also draws from 21 private datasets. → Thirty-two percent of NCES employees are statisticians, 19% survey statisticians, 15% educational researchers, and 15% management and program analysts. → NCES being in IES somewhat insulates NCES from ED-engagement because of IES's status as a semi-independent research funding agency.
<p>Recent successes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → NCES deployed the <u>School Pulse Survey</u> in fall 2021 to provide “real-time” data on the impact of pandemic on schools. → NCES produced visualizations of estimates of literacy and numeracy proficiency for all U.S. states and counties using linked data from its Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) with the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey: <u>PIAAC Skills Map</u>. → NCES made numerous advances on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to reduce costs and burden through platform administration and management advances. They are also developing automated scoring using AI engines that will be tested in 2024 with a target implementation date of 2026 and studying the use of administrative data to limit need for personal interviews of postsecondary students. → NCES implemented remote online secure access to restricted-use data sets to ease access for researchers.
<p>Agency strengths</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → NCES's products regularly receive wide attention, e.g., the Nation's Report Card, Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the School Pulse Survey, and the Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE) program. EDGE is a library of geospatial data and geo-enabled web services and APIs for which the number of requests increased from 12 million in 2022 to over 22 million in 2023. → NCES is tackling recommendations in the 2022 NASEM report, A Vision and Roadmap for Education Statistics, in order to meet the 21st century needs for education statistics. More broadly, see Status report on NCES's progress to advance its strategic goals and objectives, last updated in January 2024. → NCES has received significant attention to its challenges: see Additional Resources box.

<p>Agency threats/ vulnerabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ NCES has no professional autonomy protection in statute and in fact is undermined in ESRA as documented in Elliott et al. For example, where the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Act had stated, “No NCES data collection shall be subject to any review, coordination or approval except by OMB.” ESRA has no such protection and, instead, provides the director of IES the authority to publish “without the approval of the Secretary or any other office of the Department.” The IES director has also made demands on NCES for use of its budget, and NCES has little if any authority on decisions regarding its IT infrastructure and access to servers. This has resulted in much NCES data being held on servers of contractors. ➔ The ESRA reauthorization legislation passed by the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions renews decade-long efforts to further diminish NCES professional autonomy and stature by removing exceptions in current ESRA legislation for NCES. ➔ Removal in 2012 of Senate confirmation of the president’s nominee for the commissioner took away an important check for the individual’s qualifications, opening the door to unqualified or overly partisan leadership.
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<p>Agency challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ NCES’s staffing level is not commensurate with its budget. Including estimated staffing amounts, its budget-to-staff ratio is roughly 10 times the median of the other federal statistical agencies (Pierson 2024). Further, NCES’s portion of the IES staffing budget has declined steadily from 61% in FY 2018 to 52% in FY 2024. To fulfill its many product mandates, NCES is overly dependent on contractors—magnitudes more so than other statistical agencies. Indeed, 93% of NCES budget is used for contracting, and the FTE staff-to-contractor ratio was 1:11 in FY 2023. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCES’s limited staffing and reliance on contractors severely impairs NCES’s ability to be nimble, as contracts are signed for multiyear periods, and changes can take more than six months and are costly. NCES’s lack of agility was particularly evident at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. • Lack of staff have caused programs to be cut, delayed, or suspended. ➔ NCES is not able to easily track data usage and product downloads/website visits because of IES restrictions. This inhibits its ability to understand the use of its products by data users, which is a key input to staying relevant. ➔ The four requested budgets for NCES from this administration, FY 2022–FY 2025, have been a median change over the prior year of 1.5%, which—along with NCHS—are the lowest, by a factor of two, for the nine non-cyclical statistical agency budgets determined by Congress. (See this Google Sheet, sixth tab, Pierson et al. 2024.) The median requested increase for this period for the statistics line is 0%. For FY 2001–FY 2025, the median requested increase for the assessment line is 1.3% and, for statistics, 6.5%. ➔ NCES is not meaningfully included in department leadership meetings and in department- or administration-wide policy initiatives. Further, ED does not include NCES in meetings with congressional appropriations staff or other congressional meetings in support of the president’s budget request. ➔ The parent agency does not recognize NCES when deserved for excellence in federal statistical accomplishments and leadership.
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<p>Agency challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → ED does not allow direct contact of congressional staff with NCES leadership or employees, limiting important interaction with a major stakeholder to ensure the stakeholder understands NCES data and NCES is receiving input on its products from a key stakeholder. → Budget opaqueness: it is not publicly known how much NCES receives for its staff and other overhead from the IES program administration line. → NCES has lost 20% in purchasing power to its statistics line since FY 2010, which has resulted in the delay, suspension, and cancellation of many products and other work. See the box, <u>Impacts from Lack of Funding or Staff</u>. → NCES lacks a center-wide data system and, in some cases, cannot directly access the data collected for its surveys and programs. Instead, some data reside in the IT systems of the contracting firms carrying out the work, which increases costs because of the inefficiencies of maintaining separate systems.
<p>Agency opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → With the ability to spend its funding lines on federal staff, NCES could ensure continuous and regular administration of its many surveys and initiatives to provide more timely and relevant data, including those in the box, <u>Impacts From Lack of Funding or Staff on NCES Products and Work</u>. NCES could also consider the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue such initiatives as those <u>proposed in FY 2024</u>, including expansion of its highly successful School Pulse Survey, development of its geospatial data capabilities to create new value and new policy-relevant data products using existing data investments, and NAEP updates that would reduce costs of administering it. • Implement select recommendations of the National Academies report, <u>A Vision and Roadmap for Education Statistics</u>. • Build a federal school shooting data system and support the development of a standardized online survey tool regarding postsecondary student experiences with domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and stalking, as required of ED in the Violence Against Women Act of 2022. • Expand data access programs for parents, students, and educators to help them with their education decisions.
<p>Agency-specific recommendations</p>	<p>In addition to the all-agency recommendations in the body of the report, we recommend that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → If NCES being in IES requires IES having a say over “how” NCES does its work, NCES should be moved out of IES. Further, as the ED Statistical Official and the head of a federal statistical agency, the commissioner should report directly to the Secretary

Additional Resources

1. [An Interview with Former NCES Commissioner Lynn Woodworth](#), Lips D. and Bellafore, R., February 2024, Foundation for American Innovation.
2. [A Vision and Roadmap for Education Statistics](#), National Academies, 2022
3. [Bolstering Education Statistics to Serve the Nation](#), Elliot et al., 2023
4. [State of the Education Data Infrastructure: What Three Experts Have to Say About the National Center for Education Statistics](#), Amstat News, 2021.

IMPACTS FROM LACK OF STAFF AND FUNDING ON NCES PRODUCTS AND WORK

PRODUCT DELAYS	PRODUCT CANCELLATIONS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The National Household Education Survey planned for 2023 is delayed one year. The survey had been conducted every two years since 1991. 2. The National Teacher and Principal Survey planned for 2023–2024 is delayed one year. Until this point, the survey had been conducted every two years. 3. The Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study planned for 2023–2024 is suspended indefinitely. A new cohort had been formed roughly every eight years since 1993. 4. The School Survey on Crime and Safety: 2022 (SSOCS:2022), conducted in two-year cycles 1999–2000 to 2021–2022, is suspended indefinitely. 5. The School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), administered every two years 1989–present is continuing only due to outside funding from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Supportive Schools (OSSS). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participation in the 2026 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is canceled, including the 2025 Field Test. PIRLS is the only internationally comparable data on student achievement in reading at grade 4. 2. Participation in the 2028 International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) is canceled. ICILS is the only national or international study that assesses U.S. students' knowledge and skills in the key area of computer and information science. 3. Participation in one or both grades (4th and 8th grades) in the 2027 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is canceled. TIMSS is the only international assessment of mathematics and science at grades 4 and 8. 4. An expanded sample for PIAAC's second round of data collection, sufficient to update the PIAAC Skills Map data for every state and county, is canceled. (Note: due to Covid and flat funding, PIAAC was unable to collect data from a sample of sufficient size in 2023 to fully update the Skills Map. The next opportunity to release a full update to the 2017 estimates is most likely 2030.) 5. In March 2024, NCES announced the planned elimination of the Academic Libraries survey, beginning with the 2025–2026 cycle.

WORK POSTPONEMENTS

1. The development of a data collection and reporting system for use by postsecondary institutions for reporting to the U.S. Department of Education, which is required by the 2022 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), is postponed.
2. The development of new, optional components for IPEDS (e.g., noncredit data collection) or improvements to its existing components (additional disaggregations, such as students with disabilities and a streamlined outcomes survey) is postponed.
3. EDGE program work is postponed, including specifically:
 - Fulfillment of statutory requirements under the Geospatial Data Act of 2018 and to oversee geospatial data activities required to support statistical and statutory grant programs,
 - The implementation of the new 2020 urban area criteria across all needed data to support grant program use of those data, and
 - Research and development of the SIDE poverty estimates.
4. Developing updates to the National Postsecondary Study Aid Study is postponed.
5. The periodicity of the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) is changed from a two-year cycle to a three-year cycle, reducing the ability to understand supply and demand for teachers and principals. The frequency of Teacher and Principal Follow-ups surveys has also changed from two to three years.
6. Redesign of the Annual Reports and Information Staff's (ARIS's) current reporting systems is postponed.

WORK UNABLE TO CONDUCT

1. NCES is unable to support development and maintenance of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) data collection and reporting tool.
2. NCES would like to shift the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) from a three-year cycle to a two-year cycle to support current demand for more regular data on teacher supply, demand, and distribution, but is unable to do so.
3. NCES is unable to reinstate School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS).
4. NCES is unable to reinstate a study of postsecondary faculty (NSOPF) that would parallel the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS).
5. NCES is unable to support NAEP research and development activities included in the president's FY 2024 budget. Among the activities the R&D funding would have supported are further incorporation of AI methods to improve cost efficiencies and quality; ongoing efforts to improve measurement and skills among the growing number of lower-achieving students; and improved measurement of student socioeconomic status using advanced geospatial techniques.