

## AGENCY OVERVIEW

# National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

## Summary of Key Critical Support Areas and Leadership

### Leadership

Commissioner Peggy Carr was put on administrative leave in February; Matthew Soldner was named acting commissioner in July. Carr was appointed by President Biden and in her fourth year of a fixed six-year term.

### Budget

(see figure below, Table 2.2 in body of report, and our [online resource](#)):

- NCES's FY25 budget was kept at its FY24 level of \$307 million. Of that amount, \$122 million is for the statistics line and \$185 million is for the assessment line. This top-line funding level amounts to:
  - an estimated 2.4% loss of purchasing power from FY24.
  - an 8% loss of purchasing power from FY09 (15% loss for statistics, 2% loss for assessment).
- FY26 President's Budget Request is for \$130 million for NCES, which represents an estimated 59% loss in purchasing power from its FY25 level. Additional funding for NCES could also be provided out of an additional \$124 million requested to "to enable IES [Institute of Education Sciences] to meet statutory requirements, continue critical data collections and studies, and fund administrative expenses in the short-term."

### Staffing

(see Table 2.1 in body of report):

- All but 3 of the 102 NCES employees in January were terminated in March 2025. As of September 2025, its staffing level was 4. The firings left NCES without the following:
  - A chief statistician retained or appointed to meet the requirements of the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) and Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA).
  - Staff with expertise to comply with the requirements of the Geospatial Data Act of 2018.
  - Staff responsible for the Congressionally mandated annual Condition of Education report.
  - Staff with expertise in any of NCES's data collection, online data systems, international studies, or state longitudinal data systems grant program.

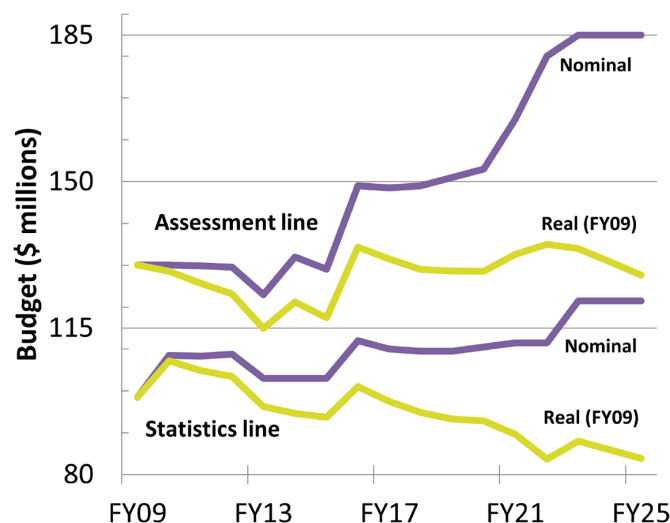
### Parent Agency

Because statistical agencies are hesitant or not allowed to communicate with outside entities, and the parent agencies are communicating little information specific to statistical agencies, we have no agency-specific updates in this category. The fact that the drastic cuts to NCES leadership, staff, and contracts as well as the proposed budget cut occurred indicates lack of support for the statistical agency, support that is required by the Evidence Act.

### Statistical Integrity Safeguards

Because statistical agencies are hesitant or not allowed to communicate with outside entities and the parent agencies are communicating little information specific to statistical agencies, we have no agency-specific updates in this category. A degree of open communication with outside stakeholders is an important component of statistical integrity safeguards and government transparency.

## National Center for Education Statistics



### Appropriations for the Two NCES Lines in Nominal and Inflation-Adjusted (“Real”) Dollars, Fiscal Years 2009–2025

NOTE: The GDP deflator is used to adjust nominal appropriations for inflation.

SOURCE: [ASA online resources](#)

## Impacts

NCES has experienced unprecedented disruption in 2025 involving mass staff terminations, leadership upheaval, canceled and delayed publications, contract cancellations, and severe proposed budget cuts—threatening the agency’s ability to fulfill its statutory mission to provide comprehensive education statistics. Virtually all NCES staff were terminated on March 11, following the February 24 placement of Commissioner Peggy Carr on administrative leave. The agency operated without a commissioner until July 7, when the Department of Education named Matthew Soldner as acting commissioner.

Among the key publications canceled or delayed, the 2024-2025 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Long-Term Trend Age 17 assessment was canceled in February. The annual Condition of Education report missed its June 1 statutory deadline, with the department later announcing it would no longer be a “singular report” but instead update indicators on a rolling basis, publishing only a sparse Part I highlights report. The 2024 Digest of Education Statistics included just 27 tables by June 1—far fewer than the nearly 270 published on average in prior years. NAEP Science results for 8th graders, administered in 2024, were delayed beyond the expected June release. The Report on Indicators of School Crime and Safety for 2024, expected in July, was pulled from the publication schedule. The National Assessment Governing Board voted to reduce NAEP’s scope for the next eight years.

While many contracts were restored, and NCES advertised in September for assessment experts to work on the NAEP, the status of NCES’s many data collections and publications are unknown. The extent and revised scope of the contracts are not publicly available, and the agency does not maintain a publication schedule. The status of the agency’s work as well as the agency itself will remain in limbo for the foreseeable future as the Department of Education (ED) awaits the recommendation of Dr. Amber Northern, [a senior advisor appointed in early summer on temporary assignment](#) to “lead a process to reenvision [the Institute of Education Sciences] and return it to its core mission ‘to provide national leadership in expanding fundamental knowledge and understanding of education from early childhood through postsecondary study.’” (NCES is one of four centers in IES.) Northern’s report is expected in early 2026.

## Summary

We maintain the 2024 ratings for each of the categories of support for NCES, three of which were already specified as the lowest rating: **WEAK**. According to our 2024 report rubric, this rating means, “The agency’s efforts to meet its Evidence Act responsibilities are severely challenged.

- Statistical integrity safeguards: **Weak**, reflecting absence of statutory protections and IES control over core functions;
- Parent agency: **Weak**, for crippling NCES operations;
- Budget: **Challenging**, recognizing 22% purchasing power loss for the statistics account since FY10; and
- Staffing level: **Weak**,\* for the decimation of NCES staffing levels.

\*This rating uses our 2024 rating rubric, but a more apt rating is nonfunctional.

## Recommendations

In our inaugural report, we made the following NCES-specific recommendation, in addition to the 15 system-wide recommendations:

- 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.

For this report, in addition to the all-agency recommendations in the body of the report, we recommend that the administration and Congress use the current opportunity to address and resolve the many barriers and impediments NCES leadership employees faced over the last few decades—bureaucratic hurdles, severe staffing constraints, and other inefficiencies—that are well documented in our inaugural report and by others.<sup>1</sup> The ASA, with input from former NCES leadership, management, and other experts, submitted comments to the Fall 2025 IES request for information; these could be implemented to immediate effect in the short term. Longer-term changes requiring statutory action are laid out in the Elliot et al. reference of footnote 1.

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<sup>1</sup>See for example, [A Vision and Roadmap for Education Statistics](#), National Academies, 2022; [Bolstering Education Statistics to Serve the Nation](#), Elliot et al., 2023; [The Nation’s Data at Risk](#), 2024, and its NCES-specific content: <https://bit.ly/NationsDataAtRiskNCES>.

## National Center for Education Statistics: 2024 Health Assessment Summary

For full text, see <https://bit.ly/NationsDataAtRiskNCES>.

The July 2024 assessment of NCES reveals the nation's second-oldest federal statistical agency facing severe structural constraints that threaten its mission to provide objective, reliable education statistics. Founded in 1867 and with a \$306 million annual budget, NCES operates under the weakest statistical integrity safeguards protections among the 13 principal federal statistical agencies.

### Key Successes and Strengths

NCES demonstrates innovation capacity despite constraints, deploying the School Pulse Survey in Fall 2021 to provide real-time pandemic impact data and producing Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) Skills Map visualizations linking international assessment data with Census's American Community Survey for all states and counties. The agency made numerous improvements to the NAEP to reduce costs and burden, developing automated AI scoring for 2026 implementation and implementing remote online secure access to restricted-use datasets. NCES products receive wide attention, with the Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE) geospatial data program seeing requests increase from 12 million in 2022 to over 22 million in 2023. The agency is tackling recommendations from the 2022 National Academies report *A Vision and Roadmap for Education Statistics*.

### Critical Challenges and Vulnerabilities

NCES faces uniquely severe structural problems. The agency has the weakest statistical integrity safeguards among federal statistical agencies, with no statutory protections and the ESRA granting authorities over data collection and hiring to IES rather than to NCES. The statistics line lost 20% purchasing power since FY10, forcing numerous product delays and cancellations including participation in international assessments (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study [PIRLS], International Computer and Information Literacy Study [ICILS], Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study [TIMSS] grades); elimination of the Academic Libraries survey; and indefinite suspension of longitudinal studies. NCES's staffing level is not commensurate with its budget—its budget-to-staff ratio is roughly 10 times the median of other statistical agencies. The agency relies excessively on contractors (93% of budget, 1:11 staff-to-contractor ratio), severely impairing agility for responding to emerging needs. The parent agency provides weak support: minimal budget request backing (median 1.5% requested increases FY22-FY25), exclusion from department leadership meetings and congressional interactions, IES demands on NCES budget without meaningful input, and hiring challenges, including rescinding incomplete hires.

### 2024 Support Ratings Summary

The assessment assigned:

- Statistical integrity safeguards: **Weak**, reflecting absence of statutory protections and IES control over core functions;
- Parent agency: **Weak**, acknowledging inadequate budget support and operational constraints; and
- Budget: **Challenging**, recognizing 20% purchasing power loss for the statistics line since FY10; and
- Staffing level: **Weak**, noting the budget-to-staff ratio roughly 10 times the median of other statistical agencies and excessive reliance on contractors.