



Adopted: March 6, 2025

National Assessment Governing Board

Assessment Framework Development

Policy Statement

It is the policy of the National Assessment Governing Board to conduct a comprehensive, inclusive, and deliberative process to determine and update the content and format of all assessments under the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The primary result of this process shall be an assessment framework (hereafter, “framework”) with objectives to guide development of NAEP assessments for students in grades 4, 8, and 12 that are reflective of widely accepted professional standards to support reliable scores and valid interpretations and uses.

The Governing Board, through its Assessment Development Committee (ADC), shall monitor the framework development and update processes to ensure that the final Governing Board-adopted framework and specifications and their development processes comply with all principles and guidelines of the Governing Board Assessment Framework Development Policy.

Introduction

Since its creation by Congress in 1988, the Governing Board has been responsible for determining the content and format of all NAEP assessments. The Governing Board has carried out this important statutory responsibility by engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders in developing recommendations for the knowledge and skills NAEP should assess in various grades and subject areas. From this comprehensive process, the Governing Board develops a framework to outline the content and format for each NAEP assessment at grades 4, 8, and 12. Development of a framework for a new assessment is guided by the schedule of NAEP assessments adopted by the Governing Board.

Under provisions of the National Assessment of Educational Progress Authorization Act of 2002 ([P.L. 107-279](#)), Congress authorized the Governing Board to continue its mandate for determining the content and format of assessments to support reliable scores and valid interpretations and uses based on widely accepted technical and professional standards for test

development and active participation of stakeholders. This mandate aligns with the purpose of NAEP, which is to provide fair and accurate measurement of student academic achievement.

Given this mandate, the Governing Board must ensure that the highest professional standards are employed in assessment framework development. The Governing Board Item Development Policy separately details principles and guidelines for NAEP assessment items, and the Governing Board has final authority on the appropriateness of all assessment items.

By law, NAEP assessments shall not evaluate personal beliefs or publicly disclose personally identifiable information, and NAEP assessment items shall be secular, neutral, and non-ideological and free from racial, cultural, gender, or regional bias.

NAEP framework development shall be informed by a broad, balanced, and inclusive set of factors. Frameworks shall consider current curricula and instruction, research regarding cognitive development and instruction, and the nation's future needs and desirable levels of achievement. This delicate balance between "what is" and "what should be" is at the core of the NAEP framework development process.

To develop new frameworks and implement substantive updates to existing frameworks when necessary, the Governing Board convenes stakeholders (via panels and broad outreach) to identify and/or provide feedback on the content and design for each NAEP assessment.

In this process, involved stakeholders shall include:

Teachers	Policymakers
Curriculum Specialists	Business Representatives
Content Experts	Parents
Assessment Specialists	Users of Assessment Data
State Administrators	Researchers and Technical Experts
Local School Administrators	Members of the public

This Policy complies with the National Assessment of Educational Progress Authorization Act of 2002 ([P.L. 107-279](#)) and the documents listed below which express widely accepted technical and professional standards for test development. These standards reflect the agreement of recognized experts in the measurement field, as well as the policy positions of major professional and technical associations concerned with educational testing. A procedures manual shall provide additional detail about how this Policy is implemented.

The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing. (2014). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education.

Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education. (2004). Washington, DC: Joint Committee on Testing Practices.

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Statistical Standards. (2012).

Principles for Framework Development

Principle 1: Elements of Frameworks

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Guidelines for the Principles

Principle 1: Elements of Frameworks

The Governing Board is responsible for developing a framework for each NAEP assessment. The framework shall define the scope of the domain to be measured by delineating the knowledge and skills to be tested at each grade, the format of the NAEP assessment, the achievement level descriptions, and recommendations for subject-specific contextual variables.

Guidelines

- a) The framework shall determine the scope of the construct (knowledge and skills) to be measured for each grade level in a NAEP assessment. The framework shall provide information to the public and test developers on three key aspects of the assessment:
 - What is to be measured, including definitions of the constructs being assessed and reported upon and descriptions of the purpose(s) of the assessment;
 - How that domain of content is most appropriately measured in a large-scale assessment, including the format requirements of the items and the assessment, the content and skills to be tested at each grade, sample items for each grade to be tested, the weighting of the item pool in terms of knowledge and skill dimensions, and any additional requirements for the assessment administration unique to a given subject area, such as provision of ancillary materials and uses of technology; and
 - How much of the content domain, in terms of knowledge and skills, should students know and be able to do at the *NAEP Basic*, *NAEP Proficient*, and *NAEP Advanced* levels in achievement level descriptions for each grade to be tested. The achievement level descriptions shall be based on the Governing Board's policy definitions for *NAEP Basic*, *NAEP Proficient*, and *NAEP Advanced* achievement and shall incorporate the knowledge and skill dimensions of the assessment at each grade.
- b) The framework shall inform the development of subject-specific contextual questionnaires for students, teachers, and school administrators by identifying variables that may help contextualize the assessment results (See the Governing Board Policy on Collecting and Reporting Contextual Data).
- c) The framework shall focus on important, measurable indicators of student achievement to inform the nation about what students know and are able to do without endorsing or advocating a particular instructional approach.
- d) Content coverage in each subject and grade shall be broad, inclusive of content valued by stakeholders as important to measure, and reflect high aspirations for student achievement.
- e) The framework shall use clear language, accessible to a wide range of interested stakeholders, and contain information about the nature and scope of the given assessment. Following Governing Board adoption, the framework shall be widely disseminated.

Principle 2: Framework Monitoring Process and Initial Decision to Proceed with Framework Updates

Regular monitoring of the NAEP content areas shall be undertaken to keep the Board informed of current issues in the field. Research and other information from ongoing monitoring processes shall inform Board decisions regarding when framework updates are needed to continue valid and reliable measurement of the knowledge and skills reflected in evolving expectations of students.

Guidelines

- a) A Content Advisory Group in each NAEP content area shall be convened at least once every two years to maintain knowledge of current issues in the field (e.g., changes in the states' or nation's educational systems or new research). Ongoing monitoring via Content Advisory Groups is intended to ensure that the Board is aware of issues that may ultimately have implications for relevant NAEP assessment frameworks. Each Content Advisory Group shall be comprised of approximately 10 content and policy experts with a diversity of backgrounds, expertise and perspectives relevant to the content area. Members shall serve on a rotating basis and a Chair and Vice Chair shall be selected by ADC to facilitate group discussions and communicate with the Governing Board and Framework Development Panels (when necessary).
- b) When significant issues in a content area are identified as having potential implications for a NAEP assessment framework, a Content Advisory Group may recommend research studies and other relevant information to be collected and/or synthesized for further consideration by the ADC.
- c) When information obtained from ongoing monitoring of a content area indicates that changes to a NAEP framework may be needed, the ADC will deliberate on whether and when to recommend that the Governing Board proceed with updates to that framework.
- d) If a Content Advisory Group does not identify any issues in the content area with potential implications for a NAEP framework within 10 years of previous updates to a framework, the Governing Board will consider seeking public comment on whether any changes are needed.
- e) With consideration of the policy and assessment issues in a content area, the Board shall develop a charge to articulate the need for an update to a framework and to specify policy guidance, constraints (including but not limited to those imposed by the NAEP legislation), and any specific tensions to resolve in the development of framework recommendations.
- f) The Board charge shall be informed by recommendations from the Content Advisory Group and (for substantive updates) from public comment sought at the beginning of the process.
- g) The Board charge also should explicitly indicate whether framework updates are

intended to be minor or substantive. The determination of the scope of the recommended updates shall be made in consultation with NCES with consideration to the operational impact of the intended changes.

- Minor updates shall have no or minimal impact to the construct and most assessment items or should address necessary revisions to accurately reflect how the framework has been operationalized in the assessment. Minor updates may also include textual changes to the framework documents that have no direct impact on the assessments. Minor updates may be carried out directly by the Content Advisory Group with additional contributors if desirable (*see Principle 3*).

Minor updates shall not be used for the purpose of circumventing the full process. The determination to proceed with a minor update is based on all the following assumptions: 1) there is not a substantive change to the construct; 2) the intended changes impact few or no assessment items; 3) the process will take no longer than 6 months; and 4) the changes are unlikely to be of significant interest to stakeholders.

- Substantive updates would be expected to impact more than a small number of assessment items. Substantive updates may require that several existing items be discontinued and/or new items be created, to reflect important changes in the content area that are still generally consistent with the current construct. Substantive updates could also require major changes to the construct and extensive changes to some or most elements of the current framework and assessment items. Substantive updates shall be carried out by convening a Development Panel (*see Principle 4*).

The full process shall be used for substantive updates, whereas minor updates shall be carried out using an expedited process. Minor updates may be conducted as often as necessary but it is anticipated that substantive updates would not be undertaken more than once every 10 years for a given framework in the absence of exceptional circumstances.

- h) The Board charge for substantive updates shall explicitly articulate whether maintaining trends with assessment results from the previous framework should be prioritized above other factors, recognizing that the initial judgment is evaluative and the ultimate determination will be made based on empirical analyses. For NAEP Reading and Mathematics in particular, maintaining trends is expected to be highly prioritized in framework updates in the absence of exceptional circumstances. It is assumed that minor updates should not pose threats to current trendlines, whereas maintaining trendlines may or may not be a realistic priority for substantive updates. The number and nature of the changes for substantive updates will directly impact the likelihood of maintaining trendlines; articulating whether or not this is a primary goal upfront via the Board charge will encourage prioritization of necessary changes.
- i) All frameworks and specification documents shall be subject to full Board approval for both minor and substantive updates.

Principle 3: Development and Update Process for Minor Changes

The Governing Board shall carry out minor updates to frameworks in an expedited manner while ensuring that the stakeholders listed in the Introduction section are engaged and informed of any minor impacts to the resulting assessments.

Guidelines

- a) Minor updates to a recommended framework and recommended assessment and item specifications (if necessary depending on the changes) shall be executed through a Content Advisory Group. The Governing Board will determine whether it is necessary to augment the Content Advisory Group with additional members, if specific expertise or viewpoints are needed to carry out the Board charge.
- b) The specific nature of the minor updates will determine the timeline and number of meetings necessary to prepare recommendations but it is anticipated that the full process for conducting minor updates would be completed in no more than 6 months.
- c) External experts will be consulted throughout the revision process as appropriate.
- d) Outreach shall be undertaken to ensure that stakeholders understand any minor impacts to the assessments resulting from minor changes to frameworks. Outreach efforts shall directly engage all stakeholder groups identified in the Introduction section. The timing and form of the outreach will be determined by the specific nature of the intended updates.

Principle 4: Development and Update Process for Substantive Changes

The Governing Board shall carry out substantive updates to frameworks through a comprehensive, inclusive, and deliberative process that involves active participation of stakeholders listed in the Introduction section.

Guidelines

- a) Framework development and update processes shall be executed primarily via a Development Panel. This process shall result in two documents for Board consideration: a recommended framework and recommended assessment and item specifications.
 - *The Framework Development Panel* shall develop drafts of the two project documents and engage in the detailed deliberations about how issues outlined in the Board charge and guidance from the Content Advisory Group should be reflected in a recommended framework. Fifteen percent of this panel (3 members) shall be current classroom teachers in the subject areas under consideration. Educators shall be drawn from schools across the nation, including individuals who work with students from high-poverty and low-performing schools, as well as public and private schools. This panel may include up to 20 members, with additional members as needed.

- b) The scope and size of a framework development project shall determine the size of the Development Panel and the number of panel meetings needed. A framework update project may require a smaller panel and fewer meetings if a smaller scope is anticipated for recommended revisions.
- c) A nominations process shall be used to seek broad input on recommendations for well-qualified individuals who represent a range of demographic characteristics, stakeholder groups, and perspectives on the key issues identified in the Board charge to the panel.
- d) From the pool of nominees, the Board will select those with the most outstanding content and education credentials to represent multiple perspectives on the key issues identified in the Board charge to the panel. The ADC shall review panelist nomination materials and recommend a slate of panelists, which shall be subject to Executive Committee approval.
- e) To ensure continuity of the process, ADC will carefully consider applications from individuals who have served on the Content Advisory Group, with the goal of having at approximately 2-4 individuals serve on both groups.
- f) The Development Panel shall be led by a Panel Leadership Team consisting of three to four panelists who reflect a variety of roles, experiences, and viewpoints in the content area. The Panel Leadership Team shall be selected by ADC to facilitate Development Panel discussions and serve as panel representatives to the Governing Board.
- g) The process that the Development Panel employs to develop recommendations for new or updated frameworks shall be comprehensive in approach and conducted in an environment that is open, balanced, and even-handed. The Development Panel shall consider all viewpoints and debate all pertinent issues in formulating consensus recommendations on the content and design of a NAEP assessment, including findings from research. Reference materials shall represent multiple views.
- h) For each new or updated framework, protocols shall be established to support panel deliberations and to develop a unified proposal for the content and design of the assessment. Written summaries of all hearings, forums, surveys, and panel meetings shall be made available in a timely manner to inform Board deliberations.
- i) The Development Panel shall consider a wide variety of resources during deliberations, including but not limited to relevant research, trends in state and local content standards and assessments, use of previous NAEP results, curriculum guides, widely accepted professional standards, scientific research, other types of research studies in the literature, key reports having significant national and international interest, international content standards and assessments, other assessment instruments in the content area, and prior NAEP frameworks, if available.
- j) A Technical Advisory Committee of technical assessment experts shall be convened to uphold the highest technical standards for development of the NAEP framework and specifications. As a resource to the framework panels, these experts shall respond to

technical issues raised during panel deliberations.

- k) An Educator Advisory Committee shall be convened to include additional practitioners in the framework development process. As a resource to the framework panels, these practitioners shall provide meaningful consultation on issues raised during panel deliberations that need input from those in the field teaching the subjects being assessed.
- l) The Content Advisory Group in the relevant content area shall be convened to provide feedback to the Development Panel throughout the process, including: initial guidance on how to implement the Board charge, review of draft documents prior to public comment, and ongoing feedback on the development and finalization of framework documents.
- m) Public comment shall be sought from a broad array of stakeholders and interested members of the public to reflect multiple perspectives on the draft framework recommendations that have been developed. Outreach efforts should directly engage all stakeholder groups identified in the Introduction section.
- n) If the Development Panel or the Board cannot reach consensus on key issues in the framework, the Board may decide to seek further stakeholder input such as through additional public comment and/or independent reviews by content experts on a framework that has been significantly revised following an earlier public comment period. The Board shall determine whether and how any further revisions to a framework shall be made.

Principle 5: Elements of Specifications

The specifications document shall be developed for use by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) as the blueprint for constructing the NAEP assessment and items.

Guidelines

- a) The assessment and item specifications shall be based on widely accepted professional testing standards. The specifications shall also be consistent with Governing Board policies regarding NAEP design, such as groupings of items, test administration conditions, and accommodations for students with disabilities and English learners. (See the Governing Board [Policy on NAEP Testing and Reporting on Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners](#)). The specifications shall be reviewed by technical assessment experts involved in the process, prior to submission to the Governing Board.
- b) The primary audience for the specifications, or assessment blueprint, shall be NCES and the contractor(s) responsible for developing the assessment.
- c) The specifications shall evolve from the framework and shall be written in sufficient detail so that item writers can develop high-quality items based on the framework objectives for grades 4, 8, and 12, where applicable. The specifications shall include, but not be limited to detailed descriptions of:

- the knowledge and skill dimensions, including the weighting of those dimensions in the pool of items at each grade;
 - types of items;
 - guidelines for stimulus material;
 - types of response formats;
 - scoring procedures;
 - achievement level descriptions;
 - administration conditions;
 - ancillary or additional materials, if any;
 - considerations for special populations;
 - sample items, including a substantial number and range of sample items with scoring guidelines for each grade level; and
 - any unique requirements for the given assessment.
- d) Special studies, if any, to be recommended in support of the framework shall be described in the specifications. This description shall provide an overview of the purpose and rationale for the study.

Principle 6: Role of the Governing Board

The Governing Board, through its ADC, shall monitor all framework development and updates. The result of this process shall be recommendations for Governing Board action in the form of two key documents: the framework and assessment and item specifications.

Guidelines

- a) The ADC shall be responsible for monitoring framework development and updates that result in recommendations to the Governing Board on the content and format of each NAEP assessment. The ADC will provide direction to the Content Advisory Groups and Development Panels, via Governing Board staff. This guidance shall ensure compliance with the NAEP law, Governing Board policies, Department of Education and government-wide regulations, and requirements of the contract(s) used to implement the framework project.
- b) In initiating a substantive framework update, the Governing Board shall balance needs for stable reporting of student achievement trends against other Board priorities and requirements. Regarding when and how an adopted framework update will be implemented, the Board may consider the NAEP Assessment Schedule, cost and technical issues, and research and innovations to support possibilities for continuous trend reporting.
- c) When the Board decides to launch a framework update, the ADC shall develop a charge for the update, and the charge shall be subject to full Board approval.
- d) The ADC shall review candidates for the Content Advisory Group and develop a recommended slate of advisors, and the recommendations shall be subject to Executive Committee approval.

- e) For substantive updates, the ADC shall review panelist nomination materials and develop a recommended slate of panelists, and the panelist recommendations shall be subject to Executive Committee approval.
- f) The ADC shall receive regular reports on the progress of framework development.
- g) The full Board shall receive periodic updates about how the Board charge is being implemented and any additional policy considerations that arise during the development process, including from public comment.
- h) At the conclusion of the framework development or update process, the Governing Board shall take final action on the recommended framework and specifications. The Governing Board shall make the final decision on the content and format of NAEP assessments. In addition to the panel recommendations, the Board may take into account other pertinent considerations about the scope of what should be assessed, such as the broader policy context of assessment in the content area under consideration.
- i) Following adoption by the Governing Board, the final framework and specifications shall be provided to NCES. These documents, which include the achievement level descriptions for *NAEP Basic*, *NAEP Proficient*, and *NAEP Advanced* and recommendations for contextual variables in the content area, are provided to NCES to guide development of NAEP assessment items and questionnaires.