



A Broader, **BOLDER** Approach to Education

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To: Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

Thanks again for meeting with our “Broader, Bolder Approach” group last week,¹ and considering our ideas for ESEA re-authorization.

You had asked us to give some further thought to a recommendation about the expansion of NAEP, as called for in our new statement. As we agreed, priorities for such expansion must be established.

As we discussed, if the federal government is to encourage the delivery of a balanced and broad curriculum, it must provide states with comparative information on student performance in more than math and reading. Other academic subjects, as well as some non-academic skills, should be assessed at the state level. NCLB required such assessment for math and reading only at the 4th and 8th grades. We urge that a new ESEA authorization expand that requirement, while preserving NAEP’s character as a low-stakes, sampled assessment.

As we discussed, expansion of state-level NAEP to reflect a balanced curriculum must take place gradually. We suggest these two priorities, one from the core academic curriculum and one from the broader curriculum:

- Science. As we discussed at our meeting, NAGB is already developing a high quality science assessment, including “hands-on” items. We are very supportive of this development effort. However, NAGP plans and has been funded to administer this assessment only at the national level. Expanding the sample to permit state-level reporting (and the improved demographic sub-groupings described above) would not require any additional development costs.

- Health Knowledge and Physical Fitness. Such an assessment should include the content of the health education curriculum (hygiene, nutrition, public health issues, etc.) as well as performance assessments to measure physical

¹ On June 18, members of the BBA Accountability Committee met with Secretary Duncan and his staff to make an advance presentation of the June 25 BBA Accountability statement. The BBA group was led by BBA Co-Chair Thomas Payzant, and included Jacqueline Bennett, Martin Orland, and Richard Rothstein

fitness. As we discussed, the State of Arkansas (and other jurisdictions) already administer reliable standardized assessments of physical fitness; this would not be a fanciful undertaking.

As our statement says, another priority should be to expand samples to improve the contextual variables that NAEP provides. We have two specific concerns:

- NAEP data presently permits disaggregation by free and reduced-price lunch eligibility. While this is important and useful, scholarly research has long found that the best predictor of student performance is parent education, even more so than family income. Therefore, NAEP should collect data on parent educational attainment (less than H.S. graduate, H.S. graduate only, some college only, B.A. and above) to connect these data by test scores. These should permit the creation of new sub-groups by parental educational attainment for comparative purposes.

- With the growth of the Hispanic origin population (and recognition of the fact that many schools, districts, and even states are moving towards a “majority minority” demographic), the category of “Hispanic,” used in NAEP, is increasingly useless and misleading. There are clear differences between children born in the United States who attended school here (and who may be 3rd generation and beyond) and recent immigrants who speak little or no English and may not have begun their educations in the United States. There are also clear differences between, say, immigrants from Cuba and those from Mexico, and Puerto Ricans who have migrated to the mainland from a more bilingual culture. The challenges facing educators in raising the achievement of children from these groups vary greatly. Similar issues arise with respect to Asians. Existing NAEP categories misleadingly suggest that Minnesota schools educating Hmong immigrants face similar challenges to Los Angeles schools with 4th generation Japanese-Americans. Therefore, we recommend that NAEP collect data on immigrant generation and the most common national origins (mother born in U.S. and immigrant mother; Cuban-origin, Mexican-origin, Puerto Rican, and other common national origins).

- Of course, race background data should continue to be collected. If immigrant-generation data (as described above) are collected, it should be possible to separate information on the performance of native African-Americans, who are the crucial sub-group of concern.

Further, we hope that as you consider filling vacancies on NAGB, you take into consideration candidates who have considered these issues and who share this BBA perspective on the role NAEP can play in promoting a balanced curriculum.

You had also expressed interest in the history of NAEP, and its initial design that assessed a much broader curriculum. We have attached a [Commentary article](#) from *Education Week* that summarizes this history. You also may be interested in a recent IES review of this history, [The Nation's Report Card: Evolution and Perspectives](#) (Edited by Lyle V. Jones and Ingram Olkin).