

## Who We Are

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the nation's source for data on the condition of education in the United States. Educators, policymakers, researchers, and parents rely on NCES data to make informed decisions and choices. NCES statistics are collected and analyzed to meet the highest standards of accuracy; are timely and objective; and are free of political influence and bias.

Statistics have been central to the federal government's role in education since 1867, when Congress created the first federal education agency to gather data on the condition of education in the states. One hundred and fifty years later, NCES is the go-to source for education data ranging from the Nation's Report Card to school safety, student achievement, and college costs.

## What We Do

NCES informs the American public about the state of education in our country. NCES data are essential for national and state policymakers to monitor the short- and long-term progress of education and the educational environment in which students learn at all stages of life. NCES is an essential resource for education researchers to explore critical questions about our education system.

**School and Enrollment Census:** NCES collects the building blocks of education data from kindergarten programs through postsecondary institutions. These data include basic counts of schools, students, staff and graduates, along with financial resources and quality indicators for every educational institution in the United States. They provide information of interest to the public and are the backbone for many NCES sample surveys and data tools.

**Assessing Progress:** NCES's family of national and international assessments monitors what our nation's students know and can do, how that has changed over time, and how it compares state-to-state and internationally. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often called the Nation's Report Card, has been a key indicator of growth in the performance of students since 1969. It is the only ongoing national, state and urban district representative assessment of what American students know and can do, and is considered the gold standard in large-scale assessment. NCES also examines how prepared adults are for today's workplace, with studies of adult literacy and an international comparison of workplace skills.

NCES also executes several international studies, including the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). They support robust comparisons of educational achievement in the United States and other countries. And NCES is a world leader in the development of digitally based student assessments.

**Education Sample Surveys:** The Center's sophisticated, nationally representative longitudinal surveys study how education and social factors affect the progress of our young people through school and into the labor force. Cross-sectional surveys that collect data at key points in the education system provide policymakers

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at the national, state, and local levels with crucial information for guiding the education system. NCES cross-sectional and longitudinal data collections are designed with sufficient sample sizes to provide data on different groups of students and staff participating in a variety of educational settings, including traditional public schools, charter schools, virtual schools, private schools, and school choice programs. NCES also collects data on educational activities that occur outside of school buildings—providing information on parental involvement in children’s education including homeschooling, and on adult technical and career education.

**Reports and Tools:** The Center’s flagship annual reports, *The Condition of Education* and *Digest of Education Statistics*, provide comprehensive, reliable, and policy-relevant data on the progress of education in the United States to Congress and the Center’s other stakeholders in the policy community. *The College Navigator*, which offers a wealth of data on the condition and quality of postsecondary institutions, is used by more than a million families each year to evaluate college options. NAEP’s Report Cards and other data tools provide dashboards monitoring student progress at the national, state, and large urban district levels. NCES’s online data tools allow researchers, think tanks, foundations, and other groups access to publications and customizable data reports as well as raw data sets. Taken together, they are invaluable resources for making evidence-based decisions.

## How We Do Our Work

NCES conducts a wide range of surveys designed to measure all aspects of the U.S. education system, from early childhood education through postgraduate and adult education. NCES collects its data through sample surveys of students, teachers, and principals, as well as through universe administrative surveys of schools, districts, state agencies, colleges, and universities.

NCES releases data in a range of formats designed to meet the needs of researchers, policymakers, news media, students, and the general public. These include publications, its website, web tools, data sets, news flashes, and social media.

All of our work is guided by a commitment to accuracy, transparency, objectivity, and data confidentiality and privacy.

NCES regularly seeks input from a broad range of stakeholders from all levels of government, academic researchers, constituent groups, and nonprofit organizations to remain responsive to issues that are important to the American public. The Center also is dedicated to ensuring the timeliness of education statistics by continuously updating methods for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data.

NCES is moving the education statistical community forward through innovative methodologies and approaches to data collection. Innovations underway will enable NCES to discover and refine new survey methods to increase sampling precision, better represent underrepresented student groups, and improve cost efficiency; reduce respondent burden; leverage technology through electronic data collections and state-of-the-art interactive digitally based assessments; amass richer, more comprehensive sources of data by linking across different types of data sets; and reach a broader range of stakeholders through accessible tools and APIs for customizing data needs.