

TO: Desk Officer for the National Center for Education Statistics Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, OMB

FROM: James L. Woodworth, Commissioner National Center for Education Statistics

SUBJECT: Delay of 2021 Administration of Grades Four and Eight Reading and Mathematics National Assessment of Educational Progress

DATE: December 4, 2020

Due to the impact of the COVID pandemic on school operations, it will not be possible for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to conduct the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments in accordance with the statutory requirements defined by the Education Sciences Reform Act which requires NAEP to be conducted in a valid and reliable manner every 2 years (20 U.S.C. 9622(b)(2)(B)).

NCES has been carefully monitoring physical attendance patterns in schools across the country. I have determined that NCES cannot at this time conduct a national-level assessment (20 U.S.C. 9622(b)(2)(A)) in a manner with sufficient validity and reliability to meet the mandate of the law. Too many students are receiving their education through distance learning or are physically attending schools in locations where outside visitors to the schools are being kept at a minimum due to COVID levels. The NAEP assessments are a key indicator of educational progress in the United States with trends going back decades. The change in operations and lack of access to students to be assessed means that NAEP will not be able to produce estimates of what students know and can do that would be comparable to either past or future national or state estimates.

As Commissioner for Education Statistics, I feel it would be in the best interests of the country and keeping with the intent of ESRA (20 U.S.C. 9622(b)(2)(B)) to postpone the next NAEP collection to 2022. By postponing the collection, we are allowing time for conditions on the ground to stabilize before attempting a large-scale national assessment. Further, if we attempted to move forward with a collection in 2021 and failed to produce estimates of student performance, we would not only have spent tens of millions of dollars, but also will not by law be able to conduct the next grades four and eight reading and mathematics assessments until 2023. By postponing to 2022, we will be more likely to get reliable national and state NAEP results closer to the statutorily prescribed timeline than if we attempt and fail to collect the data in 2021.