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NAEP is the only nationwide tool we have to measure American students' academic proficiency. For decades, NAEP has allowed us to track student achievement over time, measure differences between student demographic groups, and make meaningful comparisons between states' academic progress. Without a robust assessment tool like NAEP, how can we meaningfully measure how American students are learning, where kids excel and why, and where we need to do better?

NAEP results have always been useful, but never more so than after the COVID pandemic. NAEP scores allowed us to see how much learning U.S. students had lost and informed strategies to help educators and policymakers address learning loss. For example, states across the country, including Minnesota, looked to emulate the "Mississippi Miracle," where Mississippi emerged as a national leader in student literacy. Mississippi's literacy policies influenced the design and passage of science of reading legislation in several states, including Minnesota's own READ Act in 2023. Without NAEP data showing their progress, other states may have never known how successful Mississippi had been, missing crucial opportunities to improve literacy locally.

Furthermore, disaggregated NAEP scores are a civil rights tool: they allow us to see how different student groups are performing so we have more information about how they're being served in public schools compared to similar student groups in other states. Without NAEP, we would not have the robust evidence that shows how students living in poverty, students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners perform when compared to their peers within their states and between states. This important data drives policy change at the national, state, local, and school level to better serve students and improve outcomes.

The reductions in staffing at USED have put NAEP and its status as the "gold standard" in jeopardy. NAEP requires complex and advanced statistical knowledge and analysis. Creating representative samples of American students, developing test questions and testing their validity and reliability, analyzing enormous datasets, and publishing reports and analysis for all 50 states are behemoth tasks that require adequate staff. Reducing the workforce that delivers NAEP will create inefficiencies by creating roadblocks in data collection and analysis and limitations to the actionable data states have access to. These reductions will erode the infrastructure that we count on to measure how American students learn and eliminate the tools we need to improve student outcomes.

Simply put: we cannot improve what we don't measure. If the administration cares about America's children, the schools they attend, the communities in which they live, and their prospects for future success, measuring how they're learning and where barriers persist should be a top priority. If NAEP is discontinued or reduced, our nation's children risk falling further behind and our future will suffer.