

Matthew Soldner
Acting Director
Institute of Education Sciences
Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202-7240

RE: Information Collection Request; National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)
2026, OMB Control Number 1850-0928

Dear Acting Director Soldner:

We are writing to provide comments on the proposed Information Collection Request (ICR) for the 2026 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). All4Ed is a national nonprofit committed to expanding equitable educational opportunities for students of color, students from low-income families, and other marginalized groups. We advance transformation from the classroom to Congress by advocating for policies and practices that ensure all students graduate high school prepared for college, work, and life. Our mission relies on consistent collection of, and access to, transparent data on learning outcomes so that education leaders can adopt effective policies and target appropriate, evidence-based supports and resources to students most in need.

As the Nation's Report Card, NAEP is one of the most vital data sources in our K-12 education system. It is the only consistent, comparable measure of student learning nationally and across states and demographic groups in reading, math, and other subject areas. As NAEP is based on a nationally representative sample, its results allow comparisons of educational progress over time and between states and student groups; provide a critical snapshot of the condition of American education, which has been more important than ever since the Covid-19 pandemic; enable essential research into policies and practices that improve student learning outcomes; and help national and state education leaders make decisions to improve those outcomes.

We are concerned this administration has significantly compromised the future of NAEP given the drastic and harmful mass layoffs at the U.S. Department of Education (ED). The planning process for NAEP 2026 is behind schedule in the wake of the reduction in staff, as well as the disruptions with many [contracts](#) essential for NAEP administration, including the contract for the [NAEP Validity Studies \(NVS\) Panel](#). NAEP must continue to be administered consistent with psychometric standards and best practices—but also consistent with data privacy and security protocols. Today, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) lacks the expertise to administer NAEP fully, confidentially, and securely, as demonstrated by the statement in the [May 15, 2025 ICR](#) that the agency will no longer be able to make the requisite confidentiality assurances under the [Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act](#) (CIPSEA). The psychometricians, data analysts, and other staff who previously oversaw NAEP were responsible, along with the NCES Commissioner, for meeting CIPSEA requirements and assuring NAEP was administered in a

statistically appropriate and secure manner. Their abrupt, chaotic removal and the cancellation of multiple contracts associated with NAEP raises concerns about how NCES will continue administering NAEP consistent with the law, requirements, standards, and practices that protect the integrity, security, and credibility of the NAEP data and results.

CIPSEA sets clear legal requirements for statistical agencies like NCES. First and foremost, agencies must appoint a statistical official. These sworn officials “advise on statistical policy, techniques, and procedures” and appoint others in the agency to work with and collect statistical data.¹ CIPSEA’s provisions also include (1) creating formal policies and procedures for the production and dissemination of statistical data and for confidentiality and exclusive statistical use of that data; (2) ensuring data activities are accurate, objective, and useful; (3) training staff, contractors, and agents on their legal responsibilities; (4) securing systems to protect sensitive information; (5) tracking who accesses data and why; (6) establishing penalties for unauthorized disclosures; and (7) keeping records to show these protections are followed.² However, in its ICR request for the 2026 NAEP, ED indicated it would still make the less-stringent confidentiality assurances under the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA).

Although ESRA’s penalties for unauthorized disclosure are similar to CIPSEA, the ICR’s admission that CIPSEA assurances cannot be made for future NAEP administrations raises concern that the reckless, ill-advised reduction in force at ED left NCES without essential expertise and capacity. Notably, NCES lacks a presidentially-appointed Commissioner to serve as the agency’s statistical official. NCES must be given hiring authority and prioritize hiring the staff and expertise to administer NAEP securely and consistent with quality standards and best practices.

NAEP is an essential data source and must be preserved. But for NAEP to be administered effectively in 2026 and beyond, ED and NCES must rebuild the agency’s capacity and expertise to develop and administer the survey appropriately and confidentially, including resuming and overseeing the many [contracts](#) essential for NAEP administration and identifying the representative schools for the national sample. Staff are also sorely needed to collect and analyze the data, so that results are published on time and clearly presented to the public. All of these activities require capacity and expertise NCES does not currently have following the reduction in force.

Thank you for considering our comments. To discuss any of the comments, answer questions, or provide further information, please contact Rebeca Shackleford, our Director of Federal Government Relations, at rshackleford@all4ed.org.

Sincerely,
All4Ed

¹ The [Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002](#) (CIPSEA), Title V of the E-Government Act of 2002 (Pub. L. No. 107-347).

² *Ibid.*