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I am writing in support of a change to EDFacts that would have states report the results of their mandatory assessments in more than two categories. Before 2019, states were reporting student performance across multiple proficiency levels. I was Director of IES when the idea was floated to reduce the number of categories, and I approved the change. This, I am now convinced, was a mistake.

The federal government has limited tools to encourage education reforms. Under our constitutional system, education is overwhelmingly a state and local responsibility. To mobilize change in our education system requires that governors and local officials are motivated to improve the school systems in their jurisdictions. This is most clearly seen in the reaction to the state "league tables" that are part of the release of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

For example, when the latest NAEP scores were released earlier this year, Virginia scored low, falling behind most other states. Governor Youngkin, Secretary of Education Aimee Guidera, and Superintendent of Public Instruction Lisa Coons, supported by the state legislature, publicly committed to reforms to improve lagging performance. This mobilization of political support traces back directly to the lagging comparative performance of Virginia as documented by NAEP. Other states, such as Louisiana and Mississippi, also credited NAEP state comparisons as a spur to improved performance.

NAEP reports state-by-state scores, allowing this competition. But NAEP has little data allowing district-by-district comparisons. NAEP does run its Trial Urban District Assessment program, which oversamples students in 27 large urban districts. Here's the problem: these oversamples are very expensive (although typical of the NAEP program, cost data is almost impossible to ferret out) and the data cover only a miniscule percentage of the 13,000 or so school districts in the nation. In turn, the competitive pressure on districts that can lead to school reform and improvement in student learning outcomes is minimized.

EDFacts can help unleash competitive pressure by requiring states to report the results of their own assessments in multiple categories. This will enable researchers, including those behind the invaluable Education Recovery Scorecard, to generate "league tables" for thousands of districts—not just the 27 largest ones. With more detailed information, state assessments could be used in lieu of TUDA for district-level achievement comparisons at a fraction of the cost of TUDA.

I believe that reporting multiple achievement levels represents little or no additional burden on states, since state accountability systems typically require them to report the share of students in multiple categories anyway.

As noted above, before 2019, EDFacts reported state assessment data in multiple categories. We need to go back to that.

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