

## Case 30

# Measuring American Education Reform: National Assessment of Educational Progress

*Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1964*

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*Background.* In the early 1960s, educators and policy makers in the United States began to sense that the public's hunger for education and educational progress had outpaced factual knowledge about whether the education system was getting any more effective in educating young students. Without evidence, policy makers had no way to know if educational reforms were improving student performance or not. No assessment tool existed to monitor student performance in a comprehensive and consistent manner to provide that needed evidence.

*Strategy.* In 1964, in response to the sense of need for better evidence of the success or failure of education reforms, the Carnegie Corporation of New York allocated \$112,500 for an internal study of the feasibility and need for a regular assessment of the progress of education in the United States and the formation of a committee to explore the possibilities of measuring educational progress.<sup>446</sup>

In 1965, the Carnegie Corporation made follow-up grants totaling \$260,000 toward the development of educational assessment methods. The first grant funded the work of the newly formed exploratory committee, called the Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education. The Committee was composed of school superintendents, administrators, school board members, and others representing public and private institutions. Grants also funded a set of conferences to complement the work of the Committee in contemplating how the progress of education reform might be assessed. The Corporation also funded the development of tests to be administered for the purpose of educational assessment. The Corporation made clear that its aim was not to monitor individual student progress, but to study the progress of schools and systems.<sup>447</sup>

By 1967, the Committee decided to assess periodically the progress of the education system in ten areas of learning: reading, writing, science, mathematics, social studies, citizenship, music, literature, fine arts, and vocational education. The Committee remained determined to track learning among large groups of people rather than among individuals, schools, or school districts. That year the Corporation made a grant of \$640,000, along with additional support from the Ford Foundation, to administer trials of the instruments developed for assessment among 256 specific subpopulations divided by gender, age, socioeconomic level, and population density.<sup>448</sup>

In June 1969, the Corporation made a final grant of \$750,000 to the Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education to finalize the development of its assessment tools. The Corporation also made a \$250,000 grant to the Education Commission of the States, to which administration and control of National Assessment of Educational Progress was transferred.<sup>449</sup>

*Impact.* The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known today by the U.S. Department of Education as “the Nation’s Report Card,” was first administered in 1971. Participation in the evaluation was voluntary, and information about individual performance remains confidential.<sup>450</sup> The program was conducted on that basis until 1988, when the Federal Government established the National Assessment Governing Board to set policy for the administration of NAEP. NAEP was expanded to produce state level results in 1990. Responsibility for coordinating NAEP was shifted to the U.S. Commissioner of Education Statistics.<sup>451</sup>

Today, NAEP pursues two major objectives—measuring student achievement across jurisdictional boundaries and monitoring changes in achievement levels over time. It remains the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of the achievement levels and progress of students in American schools.<sup>452</sup> NAEP assessments are a primary source of education statistics for measuring the

effects of education policies. It has tracked gaps in student performance between white students and their minority counterparts, enabling educators to study potential contributing factors to education gaps as well as potential solutions.<sup>443</sup> Its results have been cited in assessing whether President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" policy has had a positive impact on educational outcomes,<sup>444</sup> whether private schools offer any learning advantage over public schools,<sup>445</sup> and whether students in charter schools match the performance of their public school counterparts.<sup>446</sup>

## Notes

446. Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Annual Report*, 1964, 65.
447. Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Annual Report*, 1965, 28–29, 78.
448. Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Annual Report*, 1967, 29–30, 83.
449. Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Annual Report*, 1969, 37–38.
450. "How Did NAEP Evolve," National Assessment Governing Board, <http://www.nagb.org/about/evolve.html>.
451. "How Did NAEP Evolve," National Assessment Governing Board, <http://www.nagb.org/about/evolve.html>.
452. "What is NAEP," National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/>.
453. Alain Jehlen, "Another Intriguing History," *NEA Today*, Vol. 22, No. 8 (May 2004), 29.
454. Gail Russell Chaddock, "US Report Card: Young Readers Make Big Gains," *Christian Science Monitor*, 7/15/2005, 1.
455. Teresa Mendez, "Public Schools: Do They Outperform Private Ones?" *Christian Science Monitor*, 5/11/2005, 11.
456. Caroline Hendrie, "NAEP Study Fuels Debate Over Charter Schools," *Education Week*, Vol. 24, No. 16, 1/5/2005, 5.