



National Assessment Governing Board

National Assessment of Educational Progress

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 12, 1998

Contact: Lawrence Feinberg
(202) 357-6942

Governing Board and Test Publishers Agree on Major Changes in Voluntary National Test Development Contract

The National Assessment Governing Board has reached agreement with a group of test publishers on major modifications in the contract for developing voluntary national tests in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics.

Meeting the first deadline set by Congress for preparing the proposed exams, the contract modifications carry out fully decisions made by the independent, bipartisan Governing Board at a special meeting last month.

Under legislation passed by Congress and signed by the President in November, the Board has been granted "exclusive authority" over the five-year test development contract that was awarded by the U.S. Department of Education on August 15. By law, the Board was required to decide by February 11 whether to approve, modify, or terminate the contract.

Under the revised \$45 million contract, signed late yesterday by NAGB and the American Institutes for Research (AIR), the proposed tests would be based on the same content and performance standards as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). They would be designed to provide student-level results according to the Governing Board's standards for basic, proficient, or advanced performance.

The law prohibits any pilot testing of questions or field tests before October 1, 1998, a provision that is specifically incorporated in the revised contract. Other key contract revisions include:

- Changing the contract performance periods to end on September 30 rather than August 15. This brings the calendar for future contracting decisions in line with the Congressional calendar for legislation and appropriations for future fiscal years, which start October 1.
- Setting the schedule so that test questions are written during 1998; pilot testing would be conducted in March 1999 (if Congress does not prohibit continued test development); field testing would be held in March 2000; and the first testing of fourth and eighth grade students would be offered in March 2001.

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- Removing activities beyond the scope of test development, such as supplementary performance-item booklets, marketing, publicity, and recruiting for the proposed tests.

- Ensuring that all policy decisions are made by the Governing Board. In the original contract, decisions were made by the Education Department or the test development contractor.

- Ensuring extensive deliberation and public comment before the Board decides on accommodations, such as braille or bilingual booklets, for disabled or limited-English students.

- Providing information for the Board to make four determinations required under the law. These are related to avoiding test bias; maximizing test accuracy; meeting the needs of disadvantaged, disabled, and limited English proficient students; and informing parents and students about test content, purpose, and uses.

"All of the changes are designed to bring this contract in line with the law, as passed by Congress and signed by the President," said Mark Musick, chairman of the 26-member Governing Board. "Since Congress put the Board in charge of a five-year contract, we are planning, of course, for year two and beyond. But we are not presuming--one way or the other--whether test development will continue after September 30. We are carrying out the job Congress assigned to us."

Congress is planning to take up reauthorization of the National Assessment and the Governing Board later this year, and the future of voluntary national tests will probably be part of those deliberations.

"Our plans are based on the expectation that we will receive timely guidance through the congressional authorization and budgeting process," said Roy Truby, Executive Director of the Governing Board. "We are taking steps in the contract to ensure that we are positioned to act in accordance with that guidance."

The Governing Board, composed of state and local officials, educators, and business and public representatives, was established by Congress in 1988 to set policy for NAEP, the only testing program that regularly measures achievement of a cross-section of students in U.S. elementary and secondary schools. Over the past 27 years NAEP results in a range of academic subjects have been reported for the nation, regions, and states, but not for individual students.

As authorized at a Board meeting on January 22, final approval of the revised test development contract was given by the Board's Executive Committee and special contract review committee. The review committee was headed by William T. Randall, former NAGB chairman who was state Commissioner of Education in Colorado for many years.

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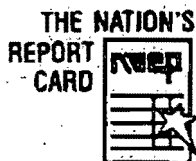
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Other members of the review committee are NAGB vice-chairman Mary Blanton, of Salisbury, NC, a lawyer and general public member of NAGB; James Ellingson, of Moorhead, MN, a fourth grade teacher; Thomas Fisher, director of student assessment for the Florida Department of Education; Edward Haertel, a professor at Stanford University who is an expert in educational testing; Diane Ravitch, former Assistant Secretary of Education under President Bush, now senior research scholar at New York University and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution; and Deborah Voltz, assistant professor of special education at the University of Louisville.

Under the contract, the American Institutes for Research will oversee the test development effort. AIR is a national, nonprofit organization with broad experience in education-related research, including large-scale assessments and program evaluation. The project director is Archie E. Lapointe, former head of the NAEP program at Educational Testing Service (ETS), the NAEP contractor since 1983.

The major test publishers and others who will continue as subcontractors include California Test Bureau/McGraw Hill, Educational Testing Service, Harcourt Brace Educational Measurement, National Computer Systems, Riverside Publishing, and Westat, Inc.

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NOTE TO MIKE COHEN

3/11/98

FROM LARRY FEINBERG

To keep you informed, Roy Truby suggested that I fax you the press statement NAGB issued today about the Governing Board action approving specifications for the Voluntary National Tests in reading and math.

Also attached is the letter which Mark Musick is sending to members of Congress and others who are interested in test development decisions.

If you would like copies of the specifications themselves, please phone me at 357-6942, and I'll send them right over to your office.

*All the best,
Larry F.*



National Assessment Governing Board

National Assessment of Educational Progress

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 11, 1998

Contact: Lawrence Feinberg
(202) 357-6942

Governing Board Adopts Specifications for Proposed Voluntary National Tests Based on NAEP Assessments

The National Assessment Governing Board has approved specifications for the proposed Voluntary National Tests in reading and mathematics, based closely on previously adopted frameworks for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

If approved by Congress and the President, the proposed exams would be in fourth grade reading and eighth grade mathematics. Under a schedule set by the Board, the tests would first be offered in March 2001 and would be designed to show whether individual students can meet NAEP standards for basic, proficient, or advanced performance.

The National Assessment is designed to measure academic achievement only for large groups of students tested on a representative-sample basis. Over the past 28 years, NAEP results have been reported for the nation, regions, and states.

"We are carrying out the job Congress asked us to do--develop a test based on NAEP that gives individual results," said Mark Musick, chairman of the independent, bipartisan Governing Board. The decisions on test content and design were made by unanimous Board votes on Saturday, March 7, at a meeting in Seattle, WA. They followed three months of deliberation, including public hearings and technical reviews.

"These tests will have the same high standards as NAEP," said James Ellingson, a teacher from Moorhead, MN, who headed the Board committee on the mathematics specifications. "Students who reach the proficient level will meet NAEP's definition of solid academic performance, and that really shows competency over challenging subject matter for their grade. At basic, students haven't reached the target yet, but they've made reasonably good progress"

Specifications for the reading test were developed by a Board committee headed by Marilyn Whirry, a teacher from Manhattan Beach, CA. "This is a straight-forward test of how well children understand what they read," Whirry said. "All their answers must be based on the text, not their personal lives or opinions." Diane Ravitch, a committee member and former Assistant Secretary of Education, said the strong standards on the test "are good for a democratic society, not just an intellectual elite. This is a test of reading for meaning that all students as citizens need to be able to do."

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Under legislation enacted by Congress in November 1997, the 26-member Board was given "exclusive authority" over development of the proposed exams. According to a House-Senate report, the new tests are to "be based on the same content and performance standards as...NAEP [and] linked to NAEP to the maximum extent possible."

Under the specifications:

- Both tests would be 90-minutes long, divided into two 45-minute segments to be administered the same day. Results will be returned to students in six weeks.
- Both would be based on current NAEP content frameworks, which were developed through a national consensus process for assessments that span grades 4, 8, and 12.
- NAEP achievement levels would be the primary means of reporting results. The tests will be designed with a sufficient number and range of items to produce reliable and valid results in terms of these performance standards.
- Neither test would be tied to a preferred teaching method or approach.
- Credit would only be given for correct answers.

"There will be nothing fuzzy about these exams," said Roy Truby, Executive Director of the Governing Board. "NAEP wants students to reason and explain how they reach their conclusions or results. In math they will have to compute. They also have to solve problems. But you can't get credit just for trying."

In the reading test:

- Passages and questions would be similar in style and difficulty-level to the grade 4 NAEP. The average length of each passage will be shorter than NAEP so that the exam includes a sufficient number of passages to provide reliable individual results.
- Like NAEP, both literary and informational passages would be presented. About 80 percent of the test would be multiple-choice items, which comprise about half of testing time. Two open-ended questions will require an extended written response of about a paragraph in length, taking an average of about five minutes to complete. The remaining short-answer questions will require a short phrase or sentence or two.
- Overall, there would be about 45 questions based on about seven reading passages.
- All answers would require reference to the text presented. No questions will ask students about personal experiences, attitudes, or feelings.

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In the mathematics test:

- The content includes computation, measurement, geometry, data analysis, and algebra, covered in the same proportions as the eighth grade NAEP. Computation would be assessed by itself and in solving problems.

- Items on which students may use calculators would comprise about one-third of the exam, the same as on NAEP. Students would be allowed to have a calculator available only during the second half of the test, but some questions in this section will deal with topics, such as measurement and geometry, for which a calculator cannot be of assistance. The Board will define which types of calculators may be used, based on contractor recommendations.

- Overall, there would be about 60 questions--80 percent of them machine-scorable. In addition to multiple-choice items, there may be some short-answer questions requiring students to fill in ovals on a machine-scorable grid. The gridded-response items would be similar to some short constructed-response questions on NAEP and would be used only if they link to NAEP strongly.

- There would be two extended constructed-response items, taking about five minutes each to complete. These will require students to solve complex multi-step problems or provide detailed explanations of their work. Partial credit may be awarded for a correct answer to the first step in a multi-step problem. Scoring will be based on math, not on the quality of writing.

The Governing Board, composed of state and local officials, educators, and business and public representatives, was established by Congress in 1988 to set policy for NAEP, the only program that regularly tests a cross-section of students nationwide and in participating states.

As part of its new responsibilities for developing Voluntary National Tests, the Board has made major changes in the five-year test development contract, previously signed by the U.S. Department of Education with a group of major test publishers. The Board's specifications supersede the recommendations of expert panels convened last summer by the Education Department. The panels were set up under a contract with the Council of Chief State School Officers and MPR Associates. In September, Education Secretary Richard Riley announced that he would not approve those recommendations, but wait for NAGB to assume responsibility.

The newly-adopted specifications will be used for writing test items and assembling them into booklets. Under the law, however, pilot testing of questions and field tests are prohibited before October 1, 1998. The law also provides for studies and evaluations by the National Academy of Sciences.

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Besides Whirry, the chairman, members of the Board committee that developed the reading specifications include Catherine Davidson, secondary education director, Central Kitsap School District, Silverdale, WA; William Moloney, Colorado State Commissioner of Education; Annette Morgan, former Democratic member, Missouri House of Representatives; Ravitch, senior research scholar, New York University, and senior fellow, Brookings Institution; and Dennie Palmer Wolf, senior research associate, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Members of the mathematics committee, besides Ellingson, the chairman, are Patsy Cavazos, elementary school principal, Houston, TX; Edward Donley, former chairman, Air Products & Chemicals, Inc., Allentown, PA; Jo Ann Pottorff, Republican member, Kansas House of Representatives; and Fannie Simmons, mathematics coordinator, District 5 of Lexington and Richland Counties, Irmo, SC. Project officer for specifications in both subjects is Mary Crovo, assistant director for test development of the Governing Board.

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National Assessment Governing Board

National Assessment of Educational Progress

March 11, 1998

The Honorable
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr.

This is to provide a report on recent action by the National Assessment Governing Board regarding the voluntary national tests.

The Governing Board has approved test specifications for the proposed voluntary national tests in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics. The decisions on the test specifications were made by unanimous Board votes on Saturday, March 7, at a meeting in Seattle, WA. They followed three months of deliberation, including public hearings and technical reviews.

The Governing Board's specifications supersede the recommendations of expert panels convened last summer by the Education Department. The panels were set up under a contract with the Council of Chief State School Officers and MPR Associates. In September, Education Secretary Richard Riley announced that he would not approve those recommendations, but wait for the Governing Board to assume responsibility.

Under P.L. 105-78, enacted by Congress in November 1997, the 26-member Board was given "exclusive authority" over development of the proposed exams. Under the law, however, pilot testing of questions and field tests are prohibited before October 1, 1998. As we reported to you in our previous letter, we have modified the test development contract in several ways to ensure that the Governing Board is appropriately positioned to follow guidance from the Congress on activities that may occur beginning on October 1. The law also provides for studies and evaluations by the National Academy of Sciences, the results of which the Governing Board plans to consider in developing policy for any voluntary national tests.

According to the accompanying conference report, the tests are to "be based on the same content and performance standards as...[the National Assessment of Educational Progress and] linked to NAEP to the maximum extent possible." This admonition was followed as the central consideration in the formulation of the test specifications by the Governing Board.

The test specifications, the blueprint for the tests, provide guidance for the writing of test questions and the structure of the tests; they are an essential element of test development. The newly-adopted specifications will be used for writing test items and assembling them into booklets. The test specifications are based closely on previously adopted frameworks for the National Assessment in reading and in mathematics.

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Thus, we believe we are carrying out the job Congress asked us to do--develop a test based on the National Assessment that gives individual results. These tests will have the same high standards as NAEP: basic, proficient, and advanced. Students who reach the proficient level will meet NAEP's definition of solid academic performance and competency over challenging subject matter for their grade. At the basic level, students haven't reached the proficient target yet, but do demonstrate partial mastery of knowledge and skills fundamental for proficient work. The advanced level denotes superior performance beyond proficient.

The Governing Board's test specifications are designed to result in straight-forward tests of how well 4th grade students understand what they read and 8th grade students perform challenging mathematics. In reading, all the answers must be based on the text, not student's personal lives or opinions. In mathematics, students will have to compute, solve problems, and explain how they reach their conclusions. Credit will be given only for correct responses. Students will not get credit just for trying.

Under the specifications:

- Both tests would be 90-minutes long, divided into two 45-minute segments to be administered the same day. Results will be returned to students in six weeks.
- Both would be based on current NAEP content frameworks, which were developed through a national consensus process for assessments that span grades 4, 8, and 12.
- NAEP achievement levels would be the primary means of reporting results. The tests will be designed with a sufficient number and range of items to produce reliable and valid results in terms of these performance standards.
- Neither test would be tied to a preferred teaching method or approach.
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In the reading test specifically:

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- Overall, there would be approximately 45 questions based on about seven reading passages.
- All answers would require reference to the text presented. No questions will ask students about personal experiences, attitudes, or feelings.

NAGB-4/16/98

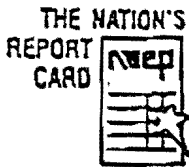
RESPONSE TO CONGRESSIONAL QUERY

Under P.L. 105-78 (enacted Nov. 13, 1997), the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent, bipartisan agency, was given "exclusive authority" over development of Voluntary National Tests in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics. The Governing Board has followed the letter and spirit of the law, which provides for test development during FY 1998, but prohibits pilot testing or field testing before October 1, 1998. The law also provides for studies and evaluations by the National Academy of Sciences.

An update on NAGB's progress follows:

- Meeting the 90-day deadline set by legislation, the Board made major changes in the test development contract with American Institutes for Research (AIR) and a group of test publishers. The end of the first contract performance period was changed to September 30, 1998 (instead of August 15) so that NAGB would be positioned to follow Congressional guidance (e.g., FY 1999 appropriations, reauthorization).
- At its March meeting, the Board approved test specifications, based closely on previously adopted content and performance standards for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Under the specifications, the tests will contain no "fuzzy" math or reading, students get credit for correct responses only, and calculator use is limited to about one-third of the math exam.

We foresee no problems, and request that NAGB be allowed to proceed as per the FY 1999 budget justification language.



National Assessment Governing Board

National Assessment of Educational Progress

FAX TRANSMITTAL COVER SHEET

DATE:

9/25

TRANSMITTED TO:

Mike Cohen

FAX NUMBER:

456-5581

PHONE #:

FROM (SENDER):

Roy Truby

FAX #: 202-357-6945

PHONE #: 202-357-6938

MESSAGE TO RECEIVING PARTY:

as promised

TOTAL NUMBER OF PAGES TRANSMITTED, INCLUDING COVER SHEET: _____

IF THERE ARE ANY PROBLEMS WITH THIS TRANSMISSION, PLEASE NOTIFY THE
SENDER IMMEDIATELY AT 202-357-6938.

Approved unanimously September 25, 1998

Resolution

Background

In November 1997, Congress assigned the Governing Board exclusive authority for developing the voluntary national tests, pursuant to contract RJ97153001 with American Institutes for Research (AIR). The Governing Board made many changes, including changing the contract to end on September 30 rather than August 15. This change was to permit the Governing Board to follow relevant appropriations or authorizing legislation enacted into law, in deciding whether to continue the contract.

At the August 1998 meeting, the Governing Board authorized the Executive Committee to take action on the continuation of the contract. However, the Board required that any substantive matters be brought to the Board for consideration.

Following the August meeting, Governing Board staff prepared and the Executive Committee approved a letter notifying AIR of the Board's intent to continue the contract for an additional year. AIR has responded. The Governing Board staff recommended, and the Executive Committee has found, that the response from AIR, overall, is sufficiently satisfactory to warrant continuation.

However, on September 17, a Continuing Resolution (CR) on the FY 1999 appropriation was passed. The CR provides for funding only from October 1 through October 9, 1998 and continues the current prohibitions against pilot testing, field testing, and implementing the voluntary national tests. Governing Board staff have consulted with House and Senate appropriations committee staff, both Republican and Democrat, and with Department of Education legal counsel to determine the options that are available with respect to the test development contract with AIR during this period of uncertainty.

On September 24, the Executive Committee met by teleconference to consider the course of action to recommend to the Governing Board.

Recommendation

The Executive Committee recommends that the National Assessment Governing Board authorize the Executive Director, in consultation with the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman,

1. to extend services for up to 30 days (i.e., through October 30, 1998) under the voluntary national test development contract with American Institutes for Research (RJ97153001); and
2. to take additional action with respect to the test development contract, consistent with enacted law, by the end of the 30-day extension period.

FOR RELEASE Contact: David Thomas
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RILEY APPOINTS THREE NEW MEMBERS TO NATIONAL ASSESSMENT GOVERNING BOARD

U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley announced today the appointment of three new members of the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB).

New members appointed to three-year terms ending September 30, 2001 are:

- o Wilmer S. Cody, commissioner of education, Kentucky Department of Education
- o Nancy Kopp, state delegate, Maryland House of Delegates
- o John H. Stevens, executive director, Texas Business and Education Coalition

"The National Assessment Governing Board is an invaluable group of Americans who provide direction and advice on establishing challenging assessments of our elementary and secondary students," Riley said. "These three new members have the skills, vision and commitment to ensure the successful design and implementation of academic achievement tests that are essential to keep track of the progress of our students over time."

Cody is president of the Council of Chief State School Officers, and nationally renowned as an effective educational practitioner and administrator. Previously, he has been executive director of the National Education Goals Panel, and superintendent of schools at the local and state levels.

Stevens currently is responsible for developing and implementing public school reform initiatives that influence the direction of state education policy by strengthening business-education partnerships, and by supporting the activities of community-based initiatives.

And as a Maryland delegate, Kopp has been instrumental in supporting legislation that has helped raise academic standards statewide and in establishing a university campus in Montgomery County, Md. She also has helped win record school construction funds and programs to take violent, disruptive students out of regular classrooms.

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The 25-member governing board develops policy guidance for the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what

students should know and can do in various subjects.

Specifically, the board:

- selects the subjects to be tested;
- identifies learning objectives for each grade tested;
- develops standards and procedures for the design, analysis, and reporting of test results;
- ensures that all items selected for use in the assessment are free from racial, cultural, gender, or regional bias; and,
- identifies appropriate achievement goals.

The secretary appoints members from nominee categories prescribed by law. The board must include governors or former governors, state legislators, educators, testing experts and curriculum specialists, as well as business and industry representatives, parents and persons representing the general public.

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- **Governing Board has followed the letter and the spirit of PL.105-78 (FY '98 appropriations act):**

- Met the 90-day deadline for accepting, revising, or terminating the AIR test development contract

- Changed the contract performance period to end on September 30 (instead of August 15) so that NAGB would be positioned to follow congressional guidance (e.g., FY'99 appropriations; NAEP/NAGB reauthorization) in deciding whether to approve a second contract year

- Added a provision specifying that FY'98 funds shall not be used to pilot test, field test, implement, or administer voluntary national tests

- **Governing Board changed the contract in many ways:**

- Changed the schedule so that:

- 1. test items are developed during 1998,
 2. pilot tests would occur in March of 1999 (if Congress does not prohibit test development beyond September 30),
 3. field tests would occur in March 2000, and
 4. the first tests would be administered in March of 2001

- Governing Board in charge of all policy and direction for the test development:

- 1. Governing Board establishes all policies; previous policy advisory structure has been eliminated from contract
 2. Governing Board approves all test items
 3. Contractor may not conduct pilot or field test without prior written approval of NAGB

- **Governing Board approved test specifications for 4th grade reading/8th grade math at March Board meeting**

- Based on NAEP content and performance standards

- 90 minutes long (two 45 minute sessions administered the same day)

- Question format will be both multiple-choice and written responses

- Math test will include computation; about 1/3 of test will permit calculator use

- What students know and can do, not how they are taught, is the focus

- No "fuzzy" reading or math; students get credit only for correct responses

- **Governing Board has requested \$4 million for FY '99 for its costs in setting policy both for NAEP and for Voluntary National Test**

- **Governing Board is making preparations for setting policy related to accommodations for students with disabilities and with limited English proficiency**

- As directed by the conference committee, NAGB will conduct public hearings in early fall, based on recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences study on "fairness"

- Board will obtain independent advice from its contractor and from legal authorities on legislative requirements, state policies and practices, research, etc., related to inclusion and test accommodations

- Board recommendations will be subject to public review and comment



National Assessment Governing Board

National Assessment of Educational Progress

January 2, 1999

Michael Cohen
Domestic Policy Council
Room 218
Old Executive Office Building
17th & Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Mr. Cohen,

I have received a letter Rep. Goodling, requesting information on activities of the National Assessment Governing Board with regard to the proposed voluntary national tests.

It is our intent to provide the Congress with accurate and timely information about the Board's plans and progress and to be responsive to requests for information. In order to provide such information, I am sending you a copy of our reply to Rep. Goodling's request.

In addition, our staff will be contacting your office soon to arrange briefings for you and other members of Congress.

Sincerely,

Mark Musick
Chairman

Enclosures

800 North Capitol Street, N.W.
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Phone: (202) 357-6938
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(TTY)—(202) 226-3118

December 12, 1997

Mr. Mark Musick, Chairman
National Assessment Governing Board
800 North Capitol Street, NW
Washington, DC 20002-4233

Dear Mr. Musick:

As you know, legislative language was included in the FY1998 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill that prohibits any Federal funds from being used to field test, pilot test, implement, administer or distribute in any way any national tests. In addition, the authority over all policies, direction and guidelines pursuant to contract RJ97153001 were vested with the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). It is my understanding that NAGB has already begun moving expeditiously to carry out its responsibilities under the legislation. As you go about carrying out your duties, I would ask that you keep in mind five major concerns:

(1) Congress did not, in the appropriations legislation, endorse or otherwise ratify the Administration's proposed national tests in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics. Nor can it be said that Congress gave a mandate to NAGB to develop new national tests in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics. Rather, recognizing that a test development contract had been executed by the Department of Education in August 1997 (and without any Congressional involvement or input), Congress sought to make the best of an already unfortunate situation. Congress simply removed the test development contract from the Department of Education and placed it under the National Assessment Governing Board.

If anything, the legislative language and report language (enclosed) reflected a disapproval of new national tests through the explicit prohibition of field testing, pilot testing, implementation, administration or distribution of national tests in FY1998. In the final analysis, whether this country shall have any new 4th and 8th grade national tests, shall be determined in the future, and will be subject to the reports and recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences, the will of the Committee on Education and the Workforce in the House and the Committee on Labor and Human Resources in the Senate, and the will of Congress. In other words, the future of

national testing remains uncertain, but in any event, will be subject to the actions of Congress.

Accordingly, I expect NAGB, in exercising its responsibilities under the conference agreement, to confirm in writing its understanding that it is not to be an advocate for new national tests, and will assure its activities will be carried out with neutrality and objectivity. This would include public statements either for or against a national test by NAGB members and staff. This would be consistent with NAGB's not having adopted any policy resolutions for or against national testing.

(2) The purpose of the proposed 4th grade reading tests and 8th grade mathematics tests has never been definitive or clearly articulated. From the time the national tests were first announced until the present, there has never been a definitive or clearly articulated purpose of the proposed tests. As you know, the purpose of a test is fundamental to virtually all aspects of test development and implementation. As part of your responsibility over "policies" and "direction" of testing under the contract or any contract modification, I would request that you carefully examine this fundamental issue and report back to me and Congress with your views.

(3) The "voluntariness" of the proposed tests needs to be explored and clarified by NAGB. On numerous occasions the Administration has emphasized that the tests are "voluntary" without clarifying the extent of the voluntariness. Are the proposed tests voluntary as to the state? school district? school? student? What will NAGB's position be on this matter?

(4) The plain language and spirit of the pilot/field testing prohibition in FY 1998 includes not only a prohibition upon the actual handing out of pilot/field tests, but also any contractual or non-contractual activities in preparation for handing out tests (i.e. printing; communication or correspondence with states, school districts, schools or others about pilot/field tests; any arrangements for administration of pilot/field tests; and any other preparatory activities short of handing out the tests to students, and any similar activities in whole or in part, etc.) Accordingly, it is my expectation that any FY1998 NAGB-modified contract will reflect such intent.

(5) The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) feasibility study mentioned in section 306 could potentially obviate the need for any new national tests. As you know, the NAS study is to determine if an equivalency scale can be developed that would allow test scores from commercially available standardized tests and state assessments to be compared with each other and with the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

In addition to these concerns, I have attached several questions for which I would appreciate receiving written answers no later than December 31, 1997. Finally, I would appreciate receiving periodic updates on NAGB's activities as set forth under the appropriations bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to present these concerns and questions. I look forward to working with you in the months ahead.

Sincerely,


BILL GOODLING
Chairman

WFG:kdt
Enclosures

Questions for the National Assessment Governing Board

1. What assurances do you intend to provide that NAGB will carry out its duties independent of the Department of Education and the White House?
2. (a) What is the status of the NAEP frameworks for 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics?

(b) When were they developed?

(c) It is my understanding that the Department of Education had originally intended to use the 1990 NAEP frameworks for the proposed 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics tests. Is that a correct understanding?

(d) Does NAGB intend to use the 1990 NAEP frameworks for any new 4th grade reading or 8th grade mathematics tests that might be developed under any potential new or modified test development contract?

(e) What is the schedule, if any, for the NAEP frameworks review and what process will be used for such review?
3. Please describe the research used to set NAEP content and performance standards for reading and discuss whether it is consistent with the National Institutes for Child Health and Human Development research on reading?
4. There are some who have criticized the item and test specifications as currently developed for the 8th grade mathematics test as promoting the so-called "new-new" or "fuzzy" math. What is your response to this criticism?
5. What manner or means does NAGB intend to use to consult with the National Academy of Sciences? the White House? the Congress?
6. How does NAGB intend to define the terms "voluntary" and "involuntary" tests?
7. What is the mission, funding process, and current budget and staffing of NAGB?
8. (a) What is the relationship, in general, between the Department of Education and NAGB?

(b) Do you have any employees on loan to you from the Department of Education? If so, what are their names and what are their job descriptions? Are they expected to report to NAGB and the Department of Education at the same time? How long are they expected to be detailed from the Department of Education to you?

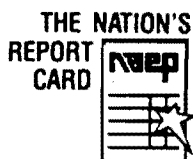
(c) What has been the content of discussions NAGB and/or its staff have had with

the Department of Education or its contractees on the proposed national testing in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics?

9. What specific responses has NAGB had to the GAO report "Educational Achievement Standards: NAGB's Approach Yields Misleading Results" (June 1993) and National Academy of Education's report "Setting Performance Standards for Student Achievement: A Report of the National Academy of Education Panel on the Evaluation of the NAEP Trial State Assessment: An Evaluation of the 1992 Achievement Levels" (1993)?
10. How does NAGB define its roles and responsibilities with regard to national testing in FY 1998 and please provide me with any and all written materials relating to same.
11. (a) What role, if any, do you anticipate the American Institutes for Research (AIR) will have now that NAGB has jurisdiction of the test development contract?

(b) What role and specific tasks does AIR fulfill that could not be handled by dealing directly with the various subcontractors working on various aspects of the test development contract?

(c) How do AIR's duties differ from NAGB's?
12. Various estimates provided earlier in the year by the Department of Education indicated that the new national tests would cost in the vicinity of \$100 million during the first year of implementation (March 1999--proposed), provided that all eligible 4th and 8th graders took the respective tests in such year. What are NAGB's views on this estimate? Do you have an independent estimate?
13. Please provide a listing of how you intend to allocate monetary resources to carry out NAGB's duties under the FY 1998 appropriations legislation (sections 305-311).



National Assessment Governing Board

National Assessment of Educational Progress

December 30, 1997

Hon. William F. Goodling, Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Goodling:

Thank you for your letter of December 12.

Enclosed are responses to the questions you asked and the materials you requested. We have included all Governing Board statements on the Board's plans for developing the proposed voluntary national tests.

Individual members of the Board may hold different views about the desirability of having such tests and as citizen members may express them. However, the Governing Board staff will reflect the Board's position on the voluntary national tests as well as the Board's policies as they are adopted. The position of the Board is given in its press statement of December 2:

"The Governing Board has not endorsed a voluntary national test and we have not opposed a voluntary national test. The Board is doing what Congress has asked us to do.

"The position of the Board has been that if there is to be a test that essentially is an adaptation of NAEP, then it should come under the NAEP umbrella. If the country finds that useful and Congress funds it and moves forward, we hope to develop a test that is worthy of consideration."

It is in this spirit that the Board is carrying out the responsibilities that were assigned to it in the FY 1998 Appropriations Act. The gist of our approach is that we intend to consult widely and act deliberately in carrying out the assignment to develop reliable examinations that are fully consistent with NAEP's content and performance standards.

As the conference report makes clear, the proposed examinations would be an individual version of the National Assessment of Educational Progress and would show whether students can meet NAEP's standards for basic, proficient, or advanced performance. How parents, teachers, and schools might use the results is an issue that the Board will consider carefully with input from all of those concerned.

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As you note in point 3 of your letter, the Board is also to address the issue of voluntary participation in the proposed tests. At our meeting last month, one of our committees began preliminary discussion of this matter. We expect to spend considerable time on it, to listen attentively to the different points of view, and to clarify what "voluntary" means.

The issue you raise in point 4 is an important one which the Board will consider as part of the contract review which it must act on by February 11. We also intend to cooperate fully with the studies being conducted by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and have already begun discussions with NAS representatives.

As our staff has indicated previously, we would very much appreciate it if you could come to one of our meetings and discuss your views with the whole Board. Our next meeting will be in Washington on January 22, and, if it is convenient for you, we invite you to speak and also have some interchange with Board members from around the country. We would also like to arrange for a briefing/discussion at your office with Board members who are leading various aspects of the work on the voluntary national tests.

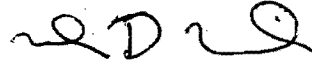
The Governing Board, as you know, is bipartisan and is required by statute to operate "independent[ly] of the Secretary and other offices and officers of the [Education] Department." The Board was established by Congress in 1988 upon the recommendation of a blue-ribbon study group appointed under the Reagan administration. The study panel called for an independent policy-making board for NAEP to make sure the assessment would be "buffered from manipulation by any individual, level of government, or special interest within the field of education."

The Governing Board has served that role for NAEP for almost a decade. It has made sure that the content and performance standards of the assessment are based on a national consensus process--not on partisan decision-making, and that NAEP would not become the arm of any administration. As a result of its independence and integrity, people on many sides of many issues in many states have looked to NAEP as a fair measure of academic achievement.

We are aware, of course, of the controversies surrounding the proposed national tests. For that very reason we hope to fulfill the same role for them--to serve as the vehicle for conducting the test development process free from partisanship and for providing the kind of deliberate, considered decision making that an independent, broadly-representative Board can give.

Thank you for your offer to work with the Governing Board in the months ahead. We appreciate it and will keep you fully informed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MDM', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mark D. Musick
Chairman

Enclosures

cc: Rep. William L. Clay
Rep. John Porter
Rep. David Obey
Sen. Jim Jeffords
Sen. Ted Kennedy
Sen. Arlen Specter
Sen. Tom Harkin
Secretary Richard W. Riley
Michael Cohen

List of Enclosures

1. Responses to Questions
2. Letter to Hon. John Conyers
3. Joint Conference on Standard-Setting: Executive Summary
4. Statement by Mark Musick, September 14, 1993
5. Comments on NAE Evaluation of NAGB Achievement Levels, by Gregory Cizek
6. Reaction to National Academy of Education Report, by Michael Kane
7. December 2, 1997 Press Release
8. November 21, 1997 Statement by Mark Musick
9. June 2, 1997 Letter to Secretary Riley
10. Board-adopted Process for Reviewing the Test Development Contract for the Voluntary National Tests
11. Board-adopted Process for Developing Final Test Specifications for the Voluntary National Tests

Responses to Questions from Chairman Goodling

1. What assurances do you intend to provide that NAGB will carry out its duties independent of the Department of Education and the White House?

Response: The authorizing legislation for the National Assessment Governing Board (National Education Statistics Act, section 412, P.L. 103-382) requires it to

“[exercise] its independent judgment, free from inappropriate influences and special interests.”

In addition, the law states that

“In the exercise of its responsibilities, the Board shall be independent of the Secretary and the other offices and officers of the Department.”

Further, the law requires the composition of the Governing Board to be bi-partisan, broadly representative of state, local, and private policy makers, administrators, and teachers, and include individuals representing the general public, parents, business, and test and curriculum experts. Governors, state legislators, chief state school officers, state and local board members, teachers, principals, parents, business people, and experts comprise the Board. They are appointed by the Secretary of Education, but generally from nominations that come from the Board itself, as a form of check and balance. The nominations submitted by the Board are based on recommendations from various organizations and associations from across the country that represent the types of individuals to be appointed.

Thus, by legislative requirement and by inclination, that inclination fostered by its very composition, the Governing Board carries out its duties independently and has done so consistently since its inception in 1988. In addition, the Board's independence is made operational through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Board and the Department and through a set of related delegations of authority from the Secretary to the Board. The MOU and delegations of authority were first instituted under then-Secretary Lamar Alexander and have been carried forward by Secretary Riley.

The independence of the Governing Board is essential in carrying out its duties under NAEP and the voluntary national tests. We have identified additional checks and balances that would be useful in ensuring and strengthening the continued independence of the Board. We would be happy to discuss these with you at your request.

2(a). What is the status of the NAEP frameworks for 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics? and (b) When were they developed?

Response: The Governing Board's framework for 4th grade reading (*Reading Framework for the National Assessment of Educational Progress: 1992 – 1998*) was used as the basis for the 1998 NAEP reading assessment. The reading framework was

developed by the Governing Board during 1989-1990 as a result of a national consensus process. This process, required under P.L. 103-382, included "the active participation of teachers, curriculum specialists, local school administrators, parents, and concerned members of the public."

For mathematics, the Board's framework (*Mathematics Framework for the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress*) was used to develop the 1996 NAEP math assessment. This framework was first developed by the Department of Education in 1988 and 1989, using a national consensus approach. However, in 1992 and 1993 the Board revised the framework and developed test specifications for math to accommodate the achievement levels that Congress mandated that the Board develop.

2(c) It is my understanding that the Department of Education had originally intended to use the 1990 NAEP frameworks for the proposed 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics tests. Is that a correct understanding?

Response: The Department of Education used the *1992-1998 NAEP Reading Framework* as a starting point for the 4th grade reading voluntary national test specifications, and the *1996 NAEP Mathematics Framework* for the voluntary national test 8th grade mathematics specifications.

2(d) Does NAGB intend to use the 1990 NAEP frameworks for any new 4th grade reading or 8th grade mathematics tests that might be developed under any potential new or modified test development contract?

Response: At its November 1997 meeting, the Governing Board approved a plan to develop voluntary national test specifications for 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics based on the *current* NAEP frameworks (see 2(a) and (b)). This is consistent with the conference report for P.L. 105-78, requiring that voluntary national tests "be based on the same content and performance standards as are used for NAEP and...linked to NAEP to the maximum extent possible."

2(e) What is the schedule, if any, for the NAEP frameworks review and what process will be used for such review?

Response: In March 1997, the Governing Board approved a NAEP schedule of assessments. This schedule called for a possible new reading assessment to be developed for the year 2006 and a possible new mathematics assessment for 2004. In addition, as part of its NAEP Redesign Policy, the Board stipulated that "test frameworks and test specifications developed for the National Assessment generally shall remain stable for at least ten years." This will enable NAEP to measure trends in student achievement over time, and to keep down the costs of the National Assessment. The Board currently is working on a policy for the review and revision of NAEP assessment frameworks.

3. Please describe the research used to set NAEP content and performance standards for reading and discuss whether it is consistent with the National Institutes for Child Health and Human Development research on reading.

The NICHD research focuses on a particular method of teaching reading, while NAEP measures student achievement in reading. Given its prominence as a national and state-level indicator of student achievement, NAEP does not espouse a single instructional method that may disadvantage some states or school districts, while favoring others. The major research used in establishing the NAEP reading framework is listed on page 21 of the framework document. This research spanned a broad spectrum of methodologies about the teaching of reading. However, the framework is based on the premise that the NAEP reading assessment should focus on measuring *how well students read*, not on a specific instructional or theoretical approach to *teaching reading*.

As required by law, the national consensus approach involved broad engagement of teachers, curriculum specialists, policy makers, and members of the general public. Members of the reading framework committees represented a broad spectrum of views regarding reading and reading instruction. A wide range of perspectives was used to inform the framework development, including research, examination of state reading frameworks, public hearings, and other sources of information.

Similarly, the NAEP performance standards in reading were developed using the NAEP framework, test specifications, and item pool. The national consensus panels that advised the Board on the standards included, as required by law, persons from various pedagogical backgrounds, having broad experience in different approaches to the teaching and learning of reading. However, no one particular research approach was favored or required in the selection of panelists.

4. There are some who have criticized the item and test specifications as currently developed for the 8th grade mathematics test as promoting the so-called “new-new” or “fuzzy” math. What is your response to this criticism?

Response: The 1996 NAEP mathematics framework calls for an assessment that measures a wide range of important basic math skills, such as computation, as well as the application of those basic skills to problems in measurement, geometry, algebra, and other math areas. In developing the math framework for the 1996 assessment, the Board consulted widely to ensure a balanced set of test objectives and specifications. For example, students are required to “read, write, rename, order, and compare numbers;” “compute with numbers (i.e., add, subtract, multiply, divide);” and “apply given measurement formulas for perimeter, area, volume, and surface area in problem settings.” Furthermore, only about one-third of the NAEP math assessment permits the use of calculators. After each NAEP assessment, test questions are released so that American parents and teachers can see for themselves the range of content on each test.

The Board is currently engaged in a process to develop a set of grade 8 mathematics specifications for the voluntary national test. This process includes a detailed analysis of the proposed 8th grade mathematics specifications developed by the Council of Chief

State School Officers: The guiding principle, consistent with the conference report for P.L. 105-78, is to ensure that voluntary national tests are: "based on the same content and performance standards as are used for NAEP and linked to NAEP to the maximum extent possible."

5(a). What manner or means does NAGB intend to use to consult with the National Academy of Sciences?

Response: Under P.L. 105-78, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is required to consult with the Governing Board, the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the White House, and the Congress on the feasibility study to determine if an equivalency scale can be developed that would allow test scores from commercially available standardized tests and State assessments to be compared with each other and the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In addition, P.L. 105-78 requires NAS to conduct two other studies, one related to the quality of test items developed for the voluntary national tests and one related to fairness in testing generally.

The Governing Board has an interest in all three of these studies, but from different perspectives. For the first, the law requires the Governing Board to serve in a consultative capacity to the NAS, along with other organizations. For the second, the NAS will be evaluating test items that are developed for the voluntary national tests, a matter that is under the Governing Board's jurisdiction. For the third, the NAS will make recommendations on means for avoiding discriminatory use of tests and for ensuring that tests are in the form most likely to yield accurate information on student achievement, a matter that could inform Governing Board policy.

The Governing Board and its staff already have a firm working relationship with the NAS, as a result of the NAS contract to evaluate the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Governing Board members and staff have made presentations at NAS meetings. Likewise, NAS members and staff have made presentations to the Governing Board. Governing Board staff meet on a monthly basis with NAS staff to review the progress of the evaluation, to help identify issues that need to be addressed, and to coordinate activities.

With respect to the NAS studies related to the voluntary national tests, the NAS Executive Director, Michael Feuer, made a presentation at the November 1997 Governing Board on the three NAS studies. Governing Board and NAS staff have met to begin discussions on the process for consultation and coordination. Although the details have not yet been worked out, we expect that, as with NAEP, the working relationship with the NAS will continue to be carried out in a professional and efficient manner.

5(b). What manner or means does NAGB intend to use to consult with the Congress?

Response: The Governing Board is grateful for your invitation to provide periodic updates on our activities as set forth under P.L. 105-78 and will do so either in person or

in writing as meets your needs. We regret the fact that you were unable to address the Board at its November meeting. However, immediately following the November Governing Board meeting, we sent your staff copies of the Board-adopted procedures and timelines for reviewing the test development contract and for preparing test specifications. We are working with your staff to see whether it is possible to arrange a briefing for you and other members of the House of Representatives around our January 22 Board meeting, or some other mutually convenient time. We are working with Senate staff to set up similar arrangements.

Our intent is to provide the Congress accurate and timely information about the Board's plans and progress and to be responsive to requests for information. At a minimum, before each Board meeting we will provide House and Senate staff with a copy of the agenda so that they may attend if their schedule permits. Following each Board meeting, we will forward to you and other interested Members a copy of the meeting report, to include any decisions or actions taken. Over time, this approach may be changed to make the process more efficient.

In this spirit of providing timely information, we intend to send copies of our reply to your letter to the leadership on both sides of the aisle of the Committee on Education and the Workforce of the House, the Labor and Human Resources Committee in the Senate, and the appropriate Appropriations subcommittees.

5(c). What manner or means does NAGB intend to use to consult with the White House?

Response: As with the Congress, our intent is to provide the White House accurate, timely information about our plans and progress and to be responsive to requests for information. At a minimum, before each Board meeting we will provide White House staff with a copy of the agenda so that they may attend if they choose. Following each Board meeting, we will forward to White House staff a copy of the meeting report, which will include any decisions or actions taken. Over time, this approach may be changed to make the process more efficient.

6. How does NAGB intend to define the terms "voluntary" and "involuntary" tests?

Response: At present, the Governing Board does not have a specific plan for defining the term "voluntary" with respect to voluntary national tests. To the extent that defining this term falls under the Governing Board's responsibilities under P.L.105-78, it will most likely be taken up in connection with the development of policies on test use and reporting.

The Board recognizes that this is a complex matter with potentially far-reaching consequences. The Board, composed of Governors, state legislators, chief state school officers, educators, members of the public and others is well constituted to make this

decision. Certainly, in the development of this definition, the Board would seek advice from representatives of state and local education agencies, school administrators and teachers, education associations and other education groups, policymakers, and the general public. Also, before adopting any such definition, the Board would make it available for public comment, both through public hearings and the submission of written comments.

7. What is the mission, funding process, and current budget and staffing of NAGB?

Response: The mission of the Governing Board is set out at section 412 of the National Education Statistics Act (NESA) (P.L. 103-382) and sections 305-311 of the FY 1998 Appropriations Act for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (P.L. 105-78). The provisions in NESA concern the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The provisions in the FY 1998 Appropriations Act concern the voluntary national tests. With respect to NAEP, under P.L.103-382 the general mission of the Governing Board is to formulate policy guidelines for the National Assessment (including determining the content of each assessment, the design of the methodology, and achievement levels for reporting results). With respect to voluntary national tests, under P.L. 105-78 the general mission of the Governing Board is to exercise exclusive authority over all policies, direction and guidelines for developing voluntary national tests pursuant to contract RJ97153001 or any subsequent contract related thereto.

The funding process involves the development by the Governing Board of a funding request for the upcoming fiscal year, presentation in the President's request to Congress, and appropriations by the Congress as a line under the Research and Statistics account of the Department of Education appropriation.

The FY 1998 budget for the Governing Board is \$3,471,000. The Governing Board employs eight full-time professional and technical staff and two full-time support staff.

8(a). What is the relationship, in general, between the Department of Education and NAGB?

Response: In general, we would characterize the relationship between the Department and the Board as professional and business-like. The relationship between the Department of Education and the Governing Board has developed over the years since the Board's inception in 1988. Its basis is the shared concern for the effectiveness and quality of the NAEP program. The Board and its staff regularly consult with staff of the National Center for Education Statistics as one important source of information in policy development for NAEP. For more specifics, please refer to response number 1, above.

8(b). Do you have any employees on loan to you from the Department of Education? If so, what are their names and what are their job descriptions? Are they expected to report to NAGB and the Department of Education at the same time? How long are they expected to be detailed from the Department to you?

Response: There are no employees on loan to the Governing Board from the Department of Education.

8(c). What has been the content of discussions NAGB and/or its staff have had with the Department of Education or its contractors on the proposed national testing in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics?

Response: The content of discussions between NAGB and the Department of Education and its contractors has been focused on the transfer of contract files to NAGB, effecting a smooth transition from Department to NAGB control of the contract, and determining the status of each task and subtask under the original award.

9. What Specific responses has NAGB had to the GAO report "Educational Achievement Standards: NAGB's Approach Yields Misleading Results" (June 1993) and the National Academy of Education's report "Setting Performance Standards for Student Achievement: A Report of the National Academy of Education Panel on the Evaluation of the NAEP Trial State Assessment: An Evaluation of the 1992 Achievement Levels" (1993)?

Response: The Governing Board's official response to the GAO report, as required by law, is found in the enclosed letter to the Honorable John Conyers, dated September 24, 1993. The letter indicates that NAGB seriously considered the recommendations in that report. A major effort was mounted between the Governing Board and the National Center for Education Statistics to develop a joint plan to review the achievement level-setting approach. The results are documented in proceedings of a Joint Conference (enclosed) held in October 1994 at which the reliability and validity of the process for setting the levels and the interpretability of NAEP scores were thoroughly investigated. In addition, the Governing Board revised its standard setting policies and reviewed all operative policy guidelines having technical ramifications. Also, the Board continued working collaboratively with NCES in the development of policies requiring technical expertise.

The Governing Board's public comments on the NAE report are contained in a September 14, 1993 statement (enclosed) by Mark Musick, then Chairman. In that response, Mr. Musick stated that "the NAE panel note[d] in its report [that] setting standards is fundamentally a matter of policy judgment, not a scientific search for 'truth.' That judgment should be informed and deliberate – and the process the Governing Board used certainly was." Mr. Musick's statement also notes that the process is similar to

ones used to set standards for licensing in various professions (e.g., surgeons, auto mechanics, and food inspectors) and is supported by years of research including some of the NAE's own studies. He also states that the Board's standards are not set too high in the light of the Adult Literacy Study, and that, over time, the process of setting the standards can be improved.

In addition, the Board requested ACT, its achievement levels contractor, to provide a technical report on the standard setting process, which examined the reliability and validity of the standards set in reading and mathematics. Also, the Board commissioned two independent reviews of the NAE report (enclosed): one by Gregory Cizek, University of Toledo, a well-known expert in standard setting, and one by Michael Kane, University of Wisconsin, a nationally recognized expert in validity. Kane concluded that "the evidence provided in the NAE report and in the [background] studies commissioned by the NAE Panel do not provide adequate support for the strong [negative] conclusions in the report." Cizek stated in the summary of his review that "the conclusions of the NAE report: 1) rely on the input of researchers who do not possess relevant expertise in the area of standard setting; 2) do not derive from the application of accepted evaluation guidelines, criteria, or procedures; 3) are presented in a systematically unbalanced manner; 4) are based upon research studies that were not particularly well-suited to answering questions of interest; and 5) lead to recommendations that would substantially harm the credibility and validity of the NAEP." Also, Ronald K. Hambleton, a widely respected psychometrician, recently noted that the achievement levels set for NAEP uses the most sophisticated, thoroughly evaluated standard-setting process in the world.

10. How does NAGB define its roles and responsibilities with regard to national testing in FY 1998 and please provide me with any and all written materials relating to same.

Response: The Governing Board defines its roles and responsibilities with regard to national testing in FY 1998 according to the requirements in sections 305-311 of P.L.105-78, the guidance provided by Congress in the accompanying conference report, and the relationship of these to the National Assessment. The Governing Board has neither endorsed nor opposed the development of a voluntary national test. It does believe, should there be a voluntary national test based on NAEP, that the Governing Board should have a role in setting policy (see enclosed statements).

11(a). What role, if any, do you anticipate the American Institutes for Research (AIR) will have now that NAGB has jurisdiction of the test development contract?

Response: The Governing Board has established a Special Committee to review the AIR contract. The role of the test development contractor is a consideration in that review. The committee has begun its work and will make a report to the Governing Board on

January 22, 1998. The committee will recommend whether to accept the contract as is, modify the contract, or terminate the contract and negotiate a new one.

11(b). What role and specific tasks does AIR fulfill that could not be handled by dealing directly with the various subcontractors working on various aspects of the test development contract?

Response: As noted in the previous response, the Governing Board has established a Special Committee to review the AIR contract. The committee has begun its work and will make a report to the Governing Board on January 22, 1998. The committee will recommend whether to accept the contract as is, modify the contract, or terminate the contract and negotiate a new one.

11(c). How do AIR's duties differ from NAGB's?

Response: The FY 1998 Appropriations Act for Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (P.L. 105-78) vests in the Governing Board exclusive authority over all policies, direction and guidelines for developing voluntary national tests pursuant to contract RJ97153001. This makes the Board the responsible contracting authority and the contract monitor. AIR is accountable to the Board under the current contract and, should it be modified, any future modified contract. Most important, P.L.105-78 makes clear that NAGB, not AIR, is responsible for all policies, direction and guidelines related to the voluntary national tests.

AIR proposed to use a wide variety of subcontractors to do the various technical work related to test development as well as the statistical linking to NAEP and TIMSS. AIR is solely responsible for coordinating the work of the subcontractors and ensuring the quality of materials submitted to the Governing Board for review and approval.

12. Various estimates provided earlier in the year by the Department of Education indicated that the new national tests would cost in the vicinity of \$100 million during the first year of implementation (March 1999—proposed), provided that all eligible 4th and 8th graders took the respective tests in such year. What are NAGB's views on this estimate? Do you have an independent estimate?

Response: It is our understanding from reviewing the public record that the \$100 million estimate is based on assumptions that the cost of testing per child would be \$10-12 and that the total number of students in the two grades is about 8 million. Whether the \$10-12 cost per child is a reasonable estimate cannot be determined until there are final approved test specifications. The final specifications will address matters such as the number of items that have to be scored by hand and the complexity and cost of items to be scored by machine. The Governing Board does not have an independent cost estimate

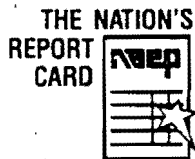
at this time. The Governing Board will be able to develop cost estimates in the future, when and if the tests are developed and the scope of testing is better defined.

Question 13. Please provide a listing of how you intend to allocate monetary resources to carry out NAGB's duties under the FY 1998 appropriations legislation.

Response: The 1998 appropriation for NAGB was \$3,471,000. This is an increase of \$606,000 over the FY 1997 appropriation level of \$2,865,000. This \$606,000 has been allocated to the voluntary national tests as follows:

Salaries and Expenses	\$296,000
Office Space, Postage, Telephone	113,000
One Time Costs: Furniture, Equipment, Space Alterations	39,000
Travel	24,000
Meetings and Public Hearings	114,000
Contracts	20,000
Grand Total	\$606,000

These are current estimates. As further needs develop or current plans change, there may be a reallocation of resources.



National Assessment Governing Board

National Assessment of Educational Progress

September 24, 1993

The Honorable John Conyers
Chairman, Government Operations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Conyers:

As required by 31 U.S.C. 720, I am responding to recommendations made in report GAO/PEMD-93-12, prepared by the General Accounting Office (GAO). The report is entitled Educational Achievement Standards: NAGB's Approach Yields Misleading Interpretations.

There are numerous issues surrounding the use of educational achievement standards about which knowledgeable people of goodwill disagree. While it is of no small consequence that U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley has endorsed our position that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) should move from a norm-referenced to a standards-based test, this is a complex undertaking, requiring close collaboration among the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), and our respective contractors. The GAO report is itself one indicator of the complexity and difficulty of this task, but I also hope that the report's ultimate effect will be to move the states and the nation forward in setting education standards. Responses to the specific GAO recommendations follow.

1. We recommend that NAGB withdraw its direction to NCES that the 1992 [NAEP] results be published primarily in terms of [achievement] levels. The conventional approach to score interpretation should be retained until an alternative has been shown to be sound (page 38).

Response: For the reasons stated below, we have not followed this recommendation.

In 1992, only mathematics, reading and writing were assessed by NAEP. A report that describes the process by which achievement levels were set in 1992, as well as information on the reliability and validity of the 1992 achievement levels has been prepared by American College Testing (ACT). ACT is the contractor that conducted the achievement level-setting process in 1992 for NAGB. A copy of the report is enclosed. The report notes that reliability and validity are not subject to "all or nothing" characterizations, but are matters of degree. The report concludes that the 1992 mathematics and reading achievement levels "are sufficiently reliable and valid for practical use [for their intended purposes]."

NCES, consistent with policies set by NAGB, works to ensure that all reports and releases of NAEP data meet accepted standards of technical soundness and that the data are released in a timely manner. A final step NCES undertakes to ensure that NAEP data meet technical standards is called "prepublication review." We note, as has GAO in footnote 18 in its report, that prepublication review by NCES for the 1992 mathematics assessment has occurred and the data have been released. Footnote 18 describes steps that have been taken already by NAGB and NCES:

The 1992 NAEP results for mathematics were published in April 1993. The achievement levels did undergo NCES prepublication review. NCES accepted NAGB's levels-setting process and the resulting scores as given and focused on the question of valid inference--on whether NAGB's statements of what students at these scores should do are useful for interpreting what students

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actually can do. Early results from technical evaluations suggested a need for further examination of the inferences that can be drawn from NAEP scores. Both the achievement level approach and the conventional anchor point approach are now under review [i.e. by NAGB and NCES]. The 1992 NAEP [mathematics] report presents data both ways, alerts readers to the questions that have been raised, and urges readers to assess for themselves how well the various forms of reporting meet their needs (page 37).

GAO's central concern about using achievement levels is that they could lead to misleading interpretations. We believe that the approach NAGB and NCES have taken is prudent and does not advance misleading interpretations. NAGB and NCES are working together to resolve the issue of how the scores should be interpreted. For reporting the 1992 NAEP reading results, NAGB and NCES jointly developed an approach that permits valid interpretations of what students can do who score at the various achievement levels set by NAGB. NCES prepublication review has been completed; for the reading report, released on September 15, 1993, the issue of appropriate score interpretations has been resolved.

NAGB has taken a different position with respect to reporting the 1992 NAEP writing results. In this case, NAGB has decided not to use achievement levels for reporting the 1992 writing assessment results. This decision does not indicate concerns about the process by which the achievement levels were developed. After the writing test was administered, data analysis showed inconsistencies in student performance across the three different kinds of writing tested by NAEP--informative, narrative and persuasive. For example, a student may have performed well on a persuasive writing item and poorly on a narrative item. The instability of performance appears to be due to the small item pool, the fact that the writing assessment involves only performance test items, and the small number of test items (i.e. one or two) to which each student responds. NAGB believes that this observed instability raises questions about standard setting on performance assessments; these questions are applicable not just to NAEP, but to other assessments as well. NAGB has recommended that a secondary report be prepared and published by NCES that would describe issues related to performance-type assessments in general and to the 1992 writing assessment in particular. This report will be useful in informing the public and practitioners about these issues.

We also note that the GAO recommendation to retain "the conventional approach to score interpretation" is problematic. The combination of scale scores and anchoring to which the [GAO] report refers as "conventional" has only been in place since the mid-1980's. While this approach may have strengths, it also has weaknesses, including the absence of any standard against which to compare student achievement. This "conventional approach" for reporting NAEP results could itself yield misleading interpretations.

2. Second, we recommend that the Chairman of NAGB and the Commissioner of Education Statistics develop a joint plan and schedule for review of NAGB's achievement levels approach...The plan should begin with a review of existing critiques of the approach and should include, at an early stage, a determination by the commissioner [of NCES] whether (1) NAGB's approach will necessarily produce invalid interpretations of NAEP scores and should not be pursued or (2) the approach is sufficiently promising that a specific plan for NCES prepublication review should be designed and implemented. If option 1 is selected, the case is closed. If the decision is to proceed, NAGB should develop evidence that the levels results are valid and reliable and that the interpretations suggested for them are valid. NCES should make clear what evidence will be required (page 39).

Response: A process for reviewing the achievement levels approach is underway. The review is taking existing critiques into account as well as lessons learned from NAGB's experience in setting achievement levels. We are giving serious consideration to the studies and some of the recommendations of the National Academy of Education, released on September 15, 1993. As indicated above in the response to GAO recommendation 1, NAGB and NCES are working together to assure that NAEP results are reported in ways that are accurate and supportable. NAGB is reviewing all aspects of its achievement levels policy, and NCES participation in this process is direct and on-going. Another component of the review of achievement level-setting involves conferences we are planning jointly, to be conducted in FY 1994. The conferences will examine the implications for NAEP of national and state-adopted content and performance standards now being developed; the design and execution of these conferences may involve a "neutral" third party. The conferences will address both policy and technical issues. In addition, NAGB is weighing the idea of conducting a national design competition to elicit alternative ways to set achievement levels for possible use with assessments to be conducted in 1996.

3. In view of the conceptual and technical flaws in NAGB's achievement levels approach (see chapter 2) and of the many questions that need to be resolved before an alternative standard-setting method can be selected, we recommend that NAGB withdraw its policy of applying the 1990 achievement levels approach to future NAEP tests and join with NCES in exploring alternatives for setting both content-based and overall performance standards with respect to NAEP. This inquiry should examine issues of purpose, technical feasibility, cost, fairness, credibility, and usefulness (Page 51).

Response: NAGB does not have a policy that requires the use of the approach taken in 1990. The approach used in 1992 was significantly modified from that used in 1990. As noted above, NAGB is in the process of reviewing and revising its achievement levels policy and also is considering the idea of conducting a national design competition to elicit alternative ways to set achievement levels. NAGB and NCES are working together on approaches that will improve the use of standards in reporting NAEP results. NAGB will continue to encourage bidders on future achievement levels contracts to suggest alternative approaches. Technical feasibility, cost, fairness, credibility, and usefulness will be among the considerations used in deciding upon the selection of any approach. As a result of these efforts, we expect that advances will continue to be made in the approaches used to set achievement levels for NAEP.

4. To ensure that it does not formulate and adopt technically unsound policies or approve technically flawed results, we recommend that NAGB:

- a. obtain NCES review of the technical strengths and weaknesses of proposed policies that implement NAGB's statutory responsibilities, prior to final decision on such policies;*
- b. analyze the probable effect of proposed policies on NAEP's ability to present achievement fairly and accurately and to support trend reporting that is both valid and reliable;*
- c. pilot test and thoroughly evaluate any new design or analysis procedure before it is fully implemented and results are reported; and*

- d. *adopt standards of technical quality (to be applied internally) for publications issued under its own authority and also secure competent external technical review of such publications prior to authorizing their release (pages 64-65).*

Response:

a. In May 1993, NAGB staff instituted a formal procedure to obtain NCES review of proposed policies. A member of the NAGB staff works with a member of the NCES staff to plan and coordinate NCES review of proposed policies. Also, NAGB and NCES staff schedule monthly joint meetings. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss matters of mutual interest, including but not limited to discussion of the technical strengths and weaknesses of proposed policies. These formal mechanisms complement the day-to-day collaboration between the two staffs on policy and operational matters. In addition, the commissioner and NCES staff attend every meeting of NAGB and are invited to participate fully in the deliberations.

b. NAGB views the maintenance of trends as a central goal of NAEP. The NAGB policy on methodology states in pertinent part that:

The foremost priority of the National Assessment will remain the assessment of progress over time; and this policy is intended to rule out changes that jeopardize the accurate estimation of trends.

The NAGB policy statement on reporting and dissemination of National Assessment results states that:

All [NAEP] results shall be reported accurately...free from unsubstantiated observations, opinions, or points of view...[and] shall contain clear information on test methodology, sampling, scoring and scaling procedures.

These policies will continue to be controlling considerations. NAGB will continue to monitor the implementation of these policies by NCES and its contractors.

c. The procedures for setting the 1992 achievement levels were pilot-tested rigorously. The results of the pilot test indicated the general efficacy of the contractor's plan and resulted in only minor adjustments in that plan. Evaluation and pilot testing are routinely performed on all aspects of NAEP; this will continue.

d. NAGB has no plans to issue publications that would require adoption of internal technical review standards. However, in the event that NAGB should issue such publications, appropriate technical standards will be applied and competent external review will be secured prior to authorizing their release.

5. *We recommend that the Chairman of NAGB review actions NAGB has taken with respect to its statutory responsibilities in the past 2 years, identify those whose technical consequences have not been sufficiently examined, and secure technical review as necessary to ensure that these actions will not generate unanticipated technical difficulties in the future (page 65).*

Response: In May 1993, NAGB began a review of all operative policy guidelines adopted since NAGB's inception in 1988. The objective of the review is to evaluate the effects and current relevance of each policy and to identify modifications, if any, that are needed.

6. We also recommend that the Chairman of NAGB review each proposed policy to ensure that NAGB prescribes policy ends, not technical details of implementation (page 65).

Response: The NAGB "Policy on Policies" states that:

Policies shall be specific enough to provide clear guidance to those expected to implement the policy, but not so specific as to dictate exactly how the policy will be implemented. Each policy shall clearly state the desired end, but leave to the implementors the responsibility for selecting the most appropriate means to that end.

NAGB shall continue to follow this approach.

7. With respect to NAGB membership, we recommend that NAGB nominate for the two testing and measurement positions only persons with relevant professional qualifications who are trained and experienced in the design and analysis of large-scale educational tests. To further add technical expertise within its currently mandated membership structure, NAGB should also ensure that two or more of its elected officials, educators, and representatives of the general public have significant technical knowledge and experience (page 65).

Response: NAGB will continue to solicit recommendations from appropriate individuals and groups and will nominate well-qualified persons for Board vacancies as they occur. Professors Jason Millman and Michael Nettles, appointed in October 1992, are eminently qualified to serve in the positions for testing and measurement experts. They were chosen by the Secretary of Education from a list of qualified individuals nominated by NAGB.

GAO Recommendations to Congress

The GAO report includes two recommendations to Congress. These two GAO recommendations are referenced below. Following each recommendation are comments that we respectfully submit for consideration by Congress.

1. We recommend that the Congress specify what it intends in directing NAGB to identify appropriate achievement goals: whether it envisions the establishment of overall performance standards, the establishment of content-based performance standards, or simply better alignment of test coverage with content mastery standards. Given that legislation to establish a mechanism for adopting national content standards is currently under consideration, the Congress may also wish to express specific guidance with respect to activities to align NAEP to content standards before such a mechanism is in place.

Comments: Education reform legislation now before the Congress puts education standard-setting on two tracks: (1) national voluntary content and performance standards and (2) state-developed content and performance standards. Neither the Senate nor the House version requires state-developed standards to be identical to national standards. Although national standards will inform those developed by states, it is likely that there will be significant variation among the standards developed by individual states, with respect to both their content and their implementation.

In order to report state and national results fairly, NAEP will need to take this diversity into account. NAGB and NCES recognize that many issues will be raised for NAEP as the national standards projects and the respective states complete their work on both content and performance standards. For example, NAEP should not ignore national standards as they emerge and are implemented, but neither should NAEP accord the standards weight that would unduly influence state decisions about curriculum matters. In order to address these and associated issues, NAGB and NCES are jointly planning conferences, to be conducted during FY 1994 with the currently funded national standards projects and state-based representatives. The conferences will explore the policy and technical implications of these national and state standards for NAEP (see also discussion above in response to GAO Recommendation 2 to NAGB).

2. We recommend that the Congress clarify the division of responsibilities between NAGB and NCES, with a view toward concentrating NAGB's efforts on the functions for which its broad representation is an asset and toward distinguishing functions NAGB itself is to implement from matters on which it is to give policy direction or advice to the commissioner. While NAGB as it is currently constituted can appropriately advise the commissioner from a constituency perspective regarding functions that are technical (such as the method and design of the assessment), it does not have the technical resources to carry out these functions and should be relieved of this apparent responsibility. When the Congress has more clearly determined what NAGB's functions should be, it should review NAGB's membership and determine the number of technically trained members needed (page 65).

Comments: The current NAEP legislation does distinguish the responsibilities of NAGB and NCES. NAGB is responsible for "formulat[ing] the policy guidelines for the National Assessment." NCES is responsible for "carry[ing] out, by grants, contracts or cooperative agreements...a National Assessment of Educational Progress [which] shall be placed in [NCES] and shall report directly to the Commissioner." In addition to its policy/programmatic responsibilities, current law also authorizes NAGB to perform administrative functions. These administrative functions include, but are not limited to, appointing personnel and authorizing contracts.

The law concentrates NAGB's programmatic functions on those "for which its broad representation is an asset" and generally distinguishes "functions NAGB itself is to implement from matters on which it is to give policy direction or advice to the Commissioner." For example, the legislation makes NAGB responsible for:

- o selecting subject areas to be assessed
- o identifying appropriate achievement goals (i.e. achievement levels)

- o devising goal statements for each learning area assessment through a national consensus approach (n.b. this is the process NAGB uses to develop the test framework for each assessment, which includes developing assessment objectives and test specifications, which also are NAGB functions authorized under current law)
- o approving the appropriateness of cognitive items and ensuring that all items selected for use in the National Assessment are free from racial, cultural, gender, or regional bias

These are functions which NAGB itself implements; they appear to be consistent with functions to be performed by a broadly representative policy body.

In addition, NAGB is responsible for:

- o developing guidelines and standards for analysis plans and for reporting and disseminating results
- o developing standards and procedures for interstate, regional and national comparisons

These are functions for which NAGB provides policy direction for implementation by NCES.

The NAEP legislation gives NAGB two final specific responsibilities. These are:

- o designing the methodology of the assessment
- o taking appropriate actions to improve the form and use of the National Assessment

NAGB understands these two provisions to refer to areas about which it is to formulate policy guidelines for implementation by NCES. For example, consider the NAGB policy on data collection and use, which bears on the design of the methodology of the assessment. The provision of the policy dealing with sampling states that:

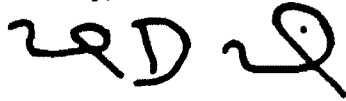
State and national samples will be representative of their respective populations. Every effort will be made to control for sampling bias.

These are policy ends, not means, just as GAO suggests. We agree with GAO that it is appropriate for NAGB to prescribe policy ends with respect to "designing the methodology of the assessment" rather than actually to do the designing itself. Similarly, NAGB understands that "taking appropriate actions to improve the form and use of the National Assessment" generally refers to steps to be taken by NAGB toward the development of policy guidance that would be implemented by NCES, not by NAGB.

The division of responsibilities is further clarified through the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between NAGB and the Department of Education and the associated delegations of authority from the Secretary to NAGB. The MOU and delegations have been in effect since March 1992 and are working to the satisfaction of the Department and NAGB.

It is fortunate that we have the National Assessment Governing Board's extensive work and experience in setting achievement levels as the basis for responding to the GAO report recommendations. Please contact me if you have any questions or if the National Assessment Governing Board can be of assistance in any other way.

Sincerely,



Mark Musick
Chairman

Enclosure

Similar letter sent to:

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Chairman, Governmental Affairs Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable William H. Natcher
Chairman, Appropriations Committee
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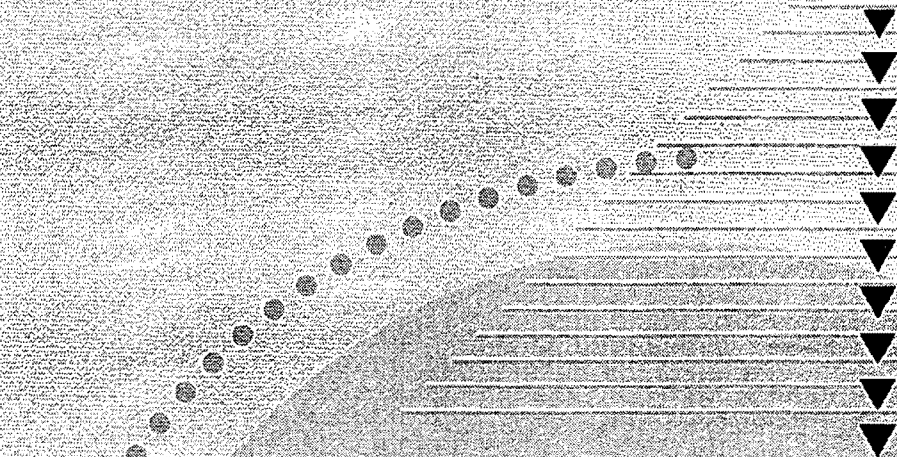
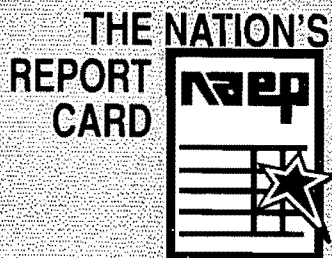
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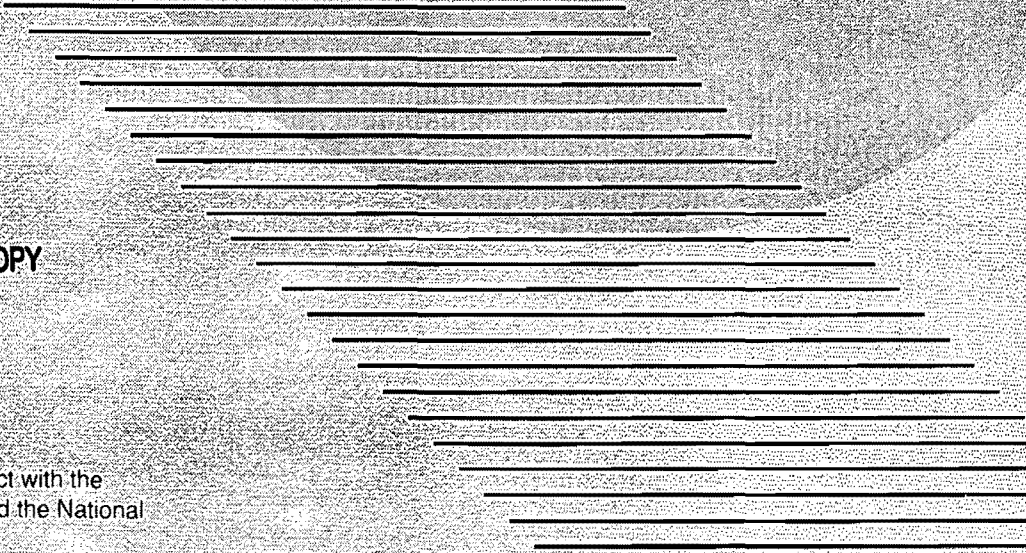
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JOINT CONFERENCE ON STANDARD SETTING FOR LARGE-SCALE ASSESSMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY VOLUME I



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