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A Vision and Roadmap for Education Statistics

The education landscape in the United States has been changing rapidly in recent decades: student populations have become more diverse; there has been an explosion of data sources; there is an intensified focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility; educators and policy makers at all levels want more and better data for evidence-based decision making; and the role of technology in education has increased dramatically.

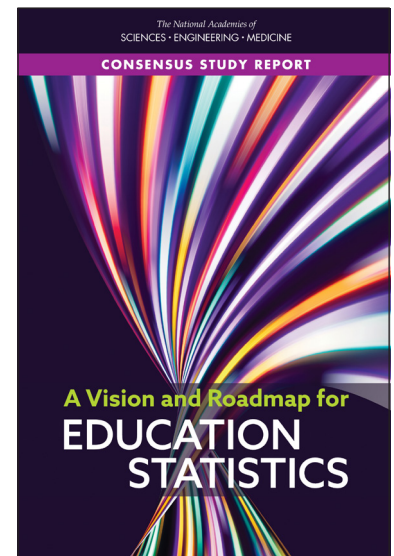
With awareness of this changed landscape, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) at the U.S. Department of Education (ED) asked the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to provide a vision for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)—the nation’s premier statistical agency for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating statistics at all levels of education. The National Academies were asked to convene a panel with expertise in education; survey design and methodology; and statistics; as well as expertise in alternative sources of data, such as relevant administrative records and private-sector data, and with experience managing a statistical agency. The panel was asked to review developments in using alternative data sources, consider recent trends and future priorities, and suggest changes to NCES’s programs and operations, with a focus on NCES’s statistical programs.

The panel reimagines NCES as a leader in the 21st century education data ecosystem, where it can meet the growing demands for policy-relevant statistical analyses and data to more effectively and efficiently achieve its mission, especially in light of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018, “the Evidence Act,” and the 2021 Presidential Executive Order on advancing racial equity.

STRATEGIC ACTION FOR A NEW NCES

The panel began its task with a question: What would a national statistical agency for education look like and what would it do if it were created today with the same level of resources?

Key to answering this question and achieving a new vision for NCES is acting strategically in all aspects of the agency’s work. Strategic planning is important for any organization to set priorities and focus on high-value



products and services for maximum effectiveness and mission impact. Such a plan is especially critical for a small agency that needs to make tough tradeoff choices with limited resources to achieve its goals.

NCES first needs to be strategic in setting priorities for its data collections and acquisitions, based on clear goals for a portfolio of products and services, including modernization of the agency’s role in data governance and data facilitation. To carry out this plan, the agency needs to use its contractor and other resources strategically. As a partner, NCES needs to listen to and address stakeholder needs and serve as a data facilitator for all of its stakeholders. In all of this, the agency needs to build and maintain its capacity for knowledge retention and innovation, staying as nimble as possible as the education landscape in the United States continues to change.

AN OVERBURDENED AGENCY

Overall, NCES has been asked to do more and more with less and less. Some of NCES’s data collections are no longer active due to a lack of adequate staffing, and it can expect additional hard choices due to limited resources. NCES simply cannot meet current and future demands for data and evidence-based analysis as it is currently operating, and it is in danger of losing institutional knowledge and innovation capabilities because of its decreasing staff size and increasing reliance on contractors.

ROADMAP TO A NEW NCES

The report offers a roadmap for a process over several years to create an NCES that is better able to meet the current and future challenges in education (see Figure 1).

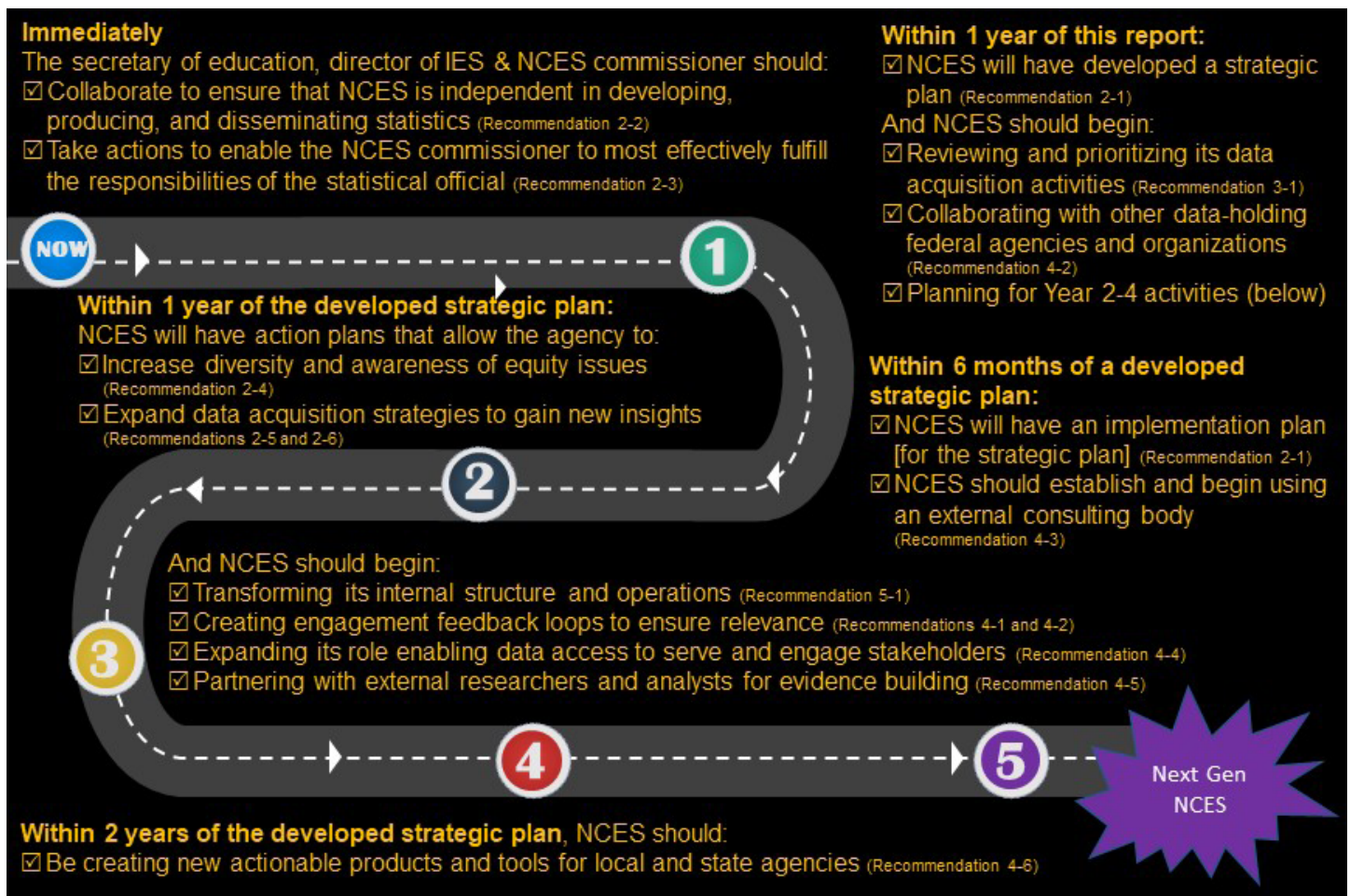


FIGURE 1 Roadmap with milestones and goalposts.

KEY PRIORITIES

Expand Focus on Data Related to Equity and Diversity A top priority, recognized by NCES, is addressing the topics of equity and equal access in all aspects of its data collection, analysis, and dissemination activities. Currently, NCES primarily collects data on the traditional educational infrastructure: it will need to expand the measurement of the nontraditional education entities that now serve many people, such as adult education and career and technical training, as well as measurement of the educational process.

Become a Leader in Evidence Building The Evidence Act effectively expanded NCES's mission by giving statistical agencies new data-acquisition authorities, duties to facilitate data access, and new roles and relationships in evidence building. The NCES commissioner needs to work with the ED secretary and the IES director to determine how to best maximize the unique value NCES brings as a producer of credible and relevant evidence, a leader in data standards, and a key facilitator of data access.

Expand Data Sources for New Insights NCES needs to take advantage of the explosion of data sources and new ways to link data to achieve its goals and create new insights for evidence building. Collaborating with other federal agencies and state and local agencies can contribute to this effort.

Assist State and Local Education Agencies Through Data Facilitation NCES can maximize its impact with minimal investment by expanding its role in data governance, particularly as a data facilitator, by assisting states and other organizations to build capacity to streamline data linkage, preparing and curating data, developing templates, and simplifying processes.

Involve Data Users in Developing Products That Better Meet Their Needs NCES should deepen and broaden its engagement with current and potential data users to better understand their needs and how NCES can more effectively meet those needs. NCES should provide clear mechanisms for feedback to create usable, actionable, and timely products for its users.

Involve Outside Researchers NCES can speed progress in evidence building by broadening the community of researchers and policy makers who can access data for analysis and to identify emerging issues. The agency should establish a joint statistical research program for external researchers and fellows, and it should expand and modernize its data licensing program to further increase responsible data access for evidence building.

**PANEL ON A VISION AND ROADMAP FOR
EDUCATION STATISTICS**

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For More Information . . . This Consensus Study Report Highlights was prepared by the Committee on National Statistics based on the Consensus Study Report *A Vision and Roadmap for Education Statistics* (2022). The study was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of any organization or agency that provided support for the project. The Consensus Study Report is available from the National Academies Press, (800) 624-6242 or <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/26392>.

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