



The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) Does Not Set “National Goals for Education”

From
**A History of NAEP Achievement Levels: Issues,
Implementation, and Impact 1989–2009**
by Mary Lyn Bourque

The National Assessment Governing Board is not authorized to establish any overarching national goals for education. It does have authority to define levels of achievement that will serve as ‘appropriate achievement goals’ on National Assessment exams . . . Hence the achievement levels defined by the Board will be used for reporting group data and making it more meaningful (National Assessment Governing Board, 1990, p. 1).

That initial policy statement goes on to say: “The proposed achievement levels will add to assessment frameworks and objectives the specific definitions of basic, proficient, and advanced achievement at each grade tested, which are based on the content of the National Assessment exams. These are not broad general goals of education or curriculum, but substantive descriptions of levels of achievement tied firmly to National Assessment questions and objectives (National Assessment Governing Board, 1990, p. 6).

These content-specific statements became known as the achievement level descriptions. The title of the early Board policy, “Setting Appropriate Achievement Levels for the National Assessment of Educational Progress” indicates that the Board initiative was never intended to reflect national goals for school subjects. Level setting was conceptualized as follows:

- *limited to better reporting the results of the NAEP survey*
- *limited to three grade levels (4, 8, and 12)*
- *limited to specific subjects areas selected by the Board*
- *limited in scope, reflecting a limited assessment framework*

The levels would answer the question, “How good is good enough, on NAEP?”

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Note: Mary Lyn Bourque is President of Mid Atlantic Psychometric Services of Leesburg, VA. From 1989 to 2000 she was assistant Director for Psychometrics of the National Assessment Governing Board.

Bourque, M.L., (2009, March). *A History of NAEP Achievement Levels: Issues, Implementation, and Impact 1989–2009 (Page 10)*. Paper Commissioned for the 20th Anniversary of the National Assessment Governing Board, 1988–2008. Retrieved April 15, 2013, from <http://www.nagb.org/content/nagb/assets/documents/who-we-are/20-anniversary/bourque-achievement-levels-formatted.pdf>



The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) Does Not Set “National Goals for Education” Part 2—Supplemental Information

The Status of NAEP Achievement Levels

The 2001 reauthorization law requires that the achievement levels be used on a trial basis until the Commissioner of Education Statistics determines that the achievement levels are "reasonable, valid, and informative to the public" (see the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, P.L. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 [2002]). Until that determination is made, the law requires the Commissioner and the National Assessment Governing Board to state clearly the trial status of the achievement levels in all NAEP reports. So far, no Commissioner has made such a determination, and the achievement levels remain in a trial status. The achievement levels should continue to be interpreted and used with caution.

A proven alternative to the current process has not yet been identified. NCES and the Board continue to call on the research community to assist in finding ways to improve standard setting for reporting NAEP results. The National Assessment Governing Board urges all who are concerned about student performance levels to recognize that the use of these achievement levels is a developing process using evolving methods and is subject to various interpretations. The Board and NCES believe that the achievement levels are useful for reporting trends in the educational achievement of students in the United States.

Retrieved May 20, 2015, from <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/achlevdev.aspx>

Also of interest:

Stoneberg, B.D. (2007). Using NAEP to confirm state testing results in the No Child Left Behind Act. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 12(5). Available online: <http://pareonline.net/pdf/v12n5.pdf>