



National Assessment: Where Is It Now?

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THE National Assessment of Educational Progress is now entering its third year of assessment of the knowledges, skills, and attitudes of America's young people. This project had generated much controversy in the 1960's from those who feared a national curriculum, invidious comparisons, and intrusion in state and local responsibilities for education. The Education Commission of the States assumed responsibility for this ongoing survey of educational accomplishment in 1969. Under the Commission's guidance, National Assessment has moved rapidly toward the role of meeting some of the feedback needs of the American public and its leaders concerning outcomes of education.

Baseline assessments in the subject areas of science, writing, citizenship, reading, and literature have now been completed. The initial reports generated from the voluminous data base have become available through the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office. The project design calls for periodic reassessments in each area from which measures of change or progress will be derived. Baseline assessments of music and social studies are currently in progress; and mathematics, career and occupational development, and art are scheduled in the future.

Data for 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds, and 17-year-olds who are in school are collected through the cooperation of a probability sample of schools, both public and private,

in all 50 states. Data on 13-year-olds are collected in October and November, 9-year-olds in January and February, and 17-year-olds in March and April. Cooperation has been very encouraging, with over 90 percent of the schools drawn in the probability sample agreeing to participate. Feedback from participating schools has been extremely positive with regard to the smoothness and lack of disruption of in-school operations.

Data on young adults in the age group 26-35, and on 17-year-olds who are not in school, are obtained from an area sample of households, the assessment materials being administered by a field interviewer in the respondent's home. A very respectable 75 percent of eligible young adults located in this fashion cooperated in the most recent out-of-school assessment of reading and literature. The out-of-school assessment goes on throughout the year.

The assessment materials are criterion-referenced, and are based upon sets of objectives developed with the aid of panels of subject matter specialists, educators, and lay people. The materials include both group administered and individually administered exercises, of a wide range of difficulty levels from very easy to very difficult, and are

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reviewed for content validity, relevance, and appropriateness as measures of the objectives for which intended.

National results for science, writing, and citizenship are currently available—these reports include for each released exercise the proportion of the respondents who answered correctly, or to some specified level. The reports contain large amounts of data which describe on a national level the accomplishments of each age group. Value judgments or interpretations have not been included, and need to be added by the user.

Results Are Available

Already prepared, and possibly available by press time of this paper, are regional comparisons (Northeast, Southeast, Central, West), comparisons by size of community (large city, urban fringe, medium-sized city, smaller places), and male-female comparisons for the same subject areas. These reports are in terms of median level of accomplishment, with atypical exercises identified and discussed.

Under preparation, and scheduled to become available at intervals through the summer of 1972, are additional science, writing, and citizenship reports covering comparisons by type of community (inner city, affluent suburbs, rural), by color (black, white), and by educational level of parent. Special reports such as writing mechanics are likewise in preparation.

Analysis of the reading and literature assessment completed this year is proceeding rapidly, with initial reports of results anticipated in the spring of 1972. Substantial effort is being devoted to preparing reports of results as soon as possible after the data

have been collected, so that in the future the lag time may be reduced. Other formats and levels of reporting are also under development, to make National Assessment reports more available and more readily understandable to a variety of audiences.

With the availability in sight of complete sets of reported results for the first year's baseline assessment of science, writing, and citizenship, various possibilities are being explored and developed for the evaluation of the results in terms of interpretations, implications for curriculum and instruction, and utilization in planning and decision making. While comparisons of measures over time to determine changes in accomplishment will not be available for quite some time, these initial results, describing in detail what groups of American youth know and can do, would seem to justify the additional effort required to interpret and apply the data. In this area, the National Assessment staff is seeking the participation of qualified educational specialists to study and interpret the results.

Review panel members who have studied various partial data over the past 18 months have found interesting and unexpected knowledge and skills (or deficiencies in them) which seem to have implications for educational practice. Hence thorough, deliberate examination of the findings should not be delayed, so that application of this never-before-available information can proceed as needed. Schools, professional organizations, and qualified individuals capable and willing to participate in this follow-through effort are being sought, and will become increasingly essential as the present trickle of data from National Assessment increases in volume, variety, and complexity. □

Future ASCD Annual Conferences

1972	March 5-8	Philadelphia	<i>Philadelphia Civic Center</i>
1973	March 17-21	Minneapolis	<i>Minneapolis Auditorium</i>
1974	March 9-13	Anaheim	<i>Anaheim Convention Center</i>
1975	March 15-19	New Orleans	<i>Rivergate</i>
1976	March 14-17	Miami Beach	<i>Convention Center</i>

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