

# Comments to National Assessment Governing Board

**August 7, 2009**

Good morning. Thank you very much Cornelia and Darv for this opportunity to speak.

I am really thrilled to be back on the Governing Board. As many of you know, I served a term between 2003 and 2007 and found that experience both exciting, rewarding, and, I believe, productive. I relished those years with this strong board, strong staff, and NCES's finest.

I shouldn't admit this publicly, but it took me about two of my four years to get up to speed on all of the important work of the board and it wasn't until I was leaving that I really felt on top of the board's full agenda. I am hoping that I haven't forgotten too much of that, and that this time around I prove to be a much quicker learner.

This is an exciting time for those of us who are involved in education, as the nation focuses vast resources on making broad changes to improve education for students across the nation.

As individuals, we Governing Board members are right at the heart of making schools better for children -- by teaching in them, leading them, developing curriculum and instructional materials, setting policy for them, and studying how to improve them.

As a collective, the Governing Board has great responsibility for NAEP -- for maintaining its reputation as the “gold standard” in assessment, and for its leadership role in challenging and pushing the field of assessment and for measuring higher order thinking skills. So for us on the board, we have both our own individual roles in improving schools and we also have this collective role in setting policy for NAEP. This is a great opportunity for all of us here to contribute to educational improvement.

I just began work two months ago as the director of the Institute of Education Sciences and I’d like to take a few minutes to talk about some of my thoughts for IES. IES is the government’s education research and evaluation arm. Our mission at IES is to provide rigorous evidence to guide education practice and policy. Administering NAEP is one of the many ways that we do that.

IES has gained a tremendous reputation over the past several years for conducting rigorous research. Some will say that IES is single-handedly responsible for a major shift across the country in the quality of education research, developing high standards for education research, and supporting both research and training across the country.

I appreciate this emphasis on quality and rigor and will continue in this vein, but with a greater focus on relevance and usability. Good research, good evaluation, and good data – including “gold standard” assessment results – are meaningful only when they are useful and relevant. One way to make this our work relevant is by creating stronger

links with both practitioners and policy-makers. This Governing Board represents such a link and has made major contributions to the accessibility and utility of NAEP results.

Before moving to Washington two months ago, I spent my entire career in Chicago doing data analysis, research, and evaluation intended to assist in school reform and improvement. For the past 12 years I worked at the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago, which has gained a national reputation for conducting research that speaks directly to the needs of practitioners and policy makers. We did this by planning our research agenda in consultation with local stakeholders, and by vetting our designs, analyses, findings, and especially the interpretations of the findings carefully with the intended users, who therefore had a greater stake in actually making use of the findings.

At the Consortium, we took a very activist role in reaching out broadly with our research findings. Rather than talk about “disseminating” findings, we talked about “facilitating” the use of the research. The key to this difference was a close partnership with the practitioners and policy makers and our hope to assist in their school improvement efforts.

One final comment on the work in Chicago as it relates to IES. We saw our role as capacity builders, and not as the bearers of definitive answers or specific solutions. We did this work through creating key indicators for improvement; building frameworks

that guide educators on how to connect the indicators to school practices; identifying the theory of action behind district policies and how they fare in practice.

How does this relate to NAEP and the Governing Board? Here are a couple of thoughts.

I hope that the board continues its push on making NAEP results easily accessible to a wide range of the public. That means reports that are readable and that are widely and actively distributed through our multiple networks and connections. It also means good websites that are full of information and easy to navigate.

But I think that we should do more than just make NAEP results easy to digest. We should also make them useful and a learning tool. I see a couple of routes for this to happen. What states and TUDA districts are making big NAEP gains? What can we learn from them? What are they doing that others can do? Where are achievement gaps being narrowed most rapidly? How is that happening? These are the kinds of questions that the board can be raising to make NAEP relevant to school improvement efforts.

Finally, I'd like to say something about the NAEP frameworks, which I believe are an underutilized asset. Let's make sure that they have a place at the table in the discussions about national standards and assessments. These frameworks have been painstakingly created – a real testament to this board and staff – and they deserve to play a prominent role in helping to decide what students should know and be able to do. This is the real heart of the matter – the NAEP scores themselves only represent

students' knowledge of these concepts and skills in the frameworks. Whenever we can, let's try to frame the discussion around the important content and skills that students need to succeed in this rapidly changing world of ours. This is the real use for NAEP. When we can, let's try to focus the discussion on what it is that we want our students to learn and what they are and are not learning.

Again, thank you for the welcome, and I look forward to a close working relationship between IES, NCES, and this wonderful board and staff.