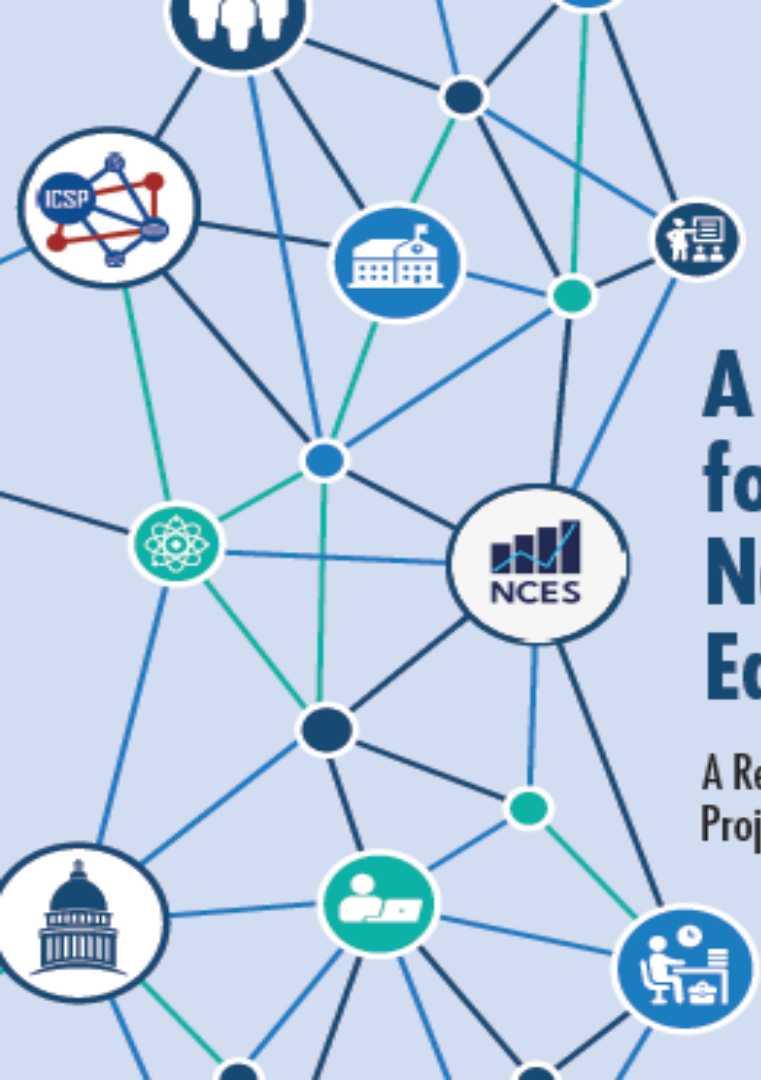




AMERICAN STATISTICAL ASSOCIATION
Promoting the Practice and Profession of Statistics®

A Vision and Strategy for Remaking the National Center for Education Statistics

A Report from the American Statistical Association
Project Team on Re-envisioning NCES

Shelly Wilkie Martinez

<https://bit.ly/Re-EnvisioningNCES>

September 11, 2026



Why a vision and strategy for remaking NCES right now?

Long standing ASA concerns with NCES's staff-to-contractor & staff-to-budget ratios

+

Headlong dismantling of NCES in 2025

+

Rumblings that states or the private sector could do the work instead

=

An opportunity & obligation to harness the crisis for good



Presentation Outline

About ASA's project on reimagining NCES

Phase 1 – complete

Phase 2 – starting now

About the report

Background/Context

Findings

Vision and Strategy

Calls to Action / Next Steps



The Project: Phases I & II



Background on Project - Phase I

(Spring 2025 to August 2026)

Core ideas

- We have a rare opportunity to re-envision NCES
- We collected a range of views on NCES
- We considered those views through a statistical lens to inform a path to a healthy NCES
- It will take a village to achieve this vision

The team (which grew over as funding became available)

- Michelle Crosby, Shelly Martinez, Steve Pierson, then Gail Mulligan & Stephen Provasnik
- Advisors: Peggy Carr & Lynn Woodworth

Project Activities: Phase I

Thanks to Lumina Foundation, we held 3 roundtables

1. Think tanks and data policy groups, October 28, 2025; [summary](#)
2. Philanthropic groups, February 27, 2026; [summary](#)
3. Visionary education data experts, May 1, 2026; [summary](#)

Thanks to William T. Grant Foundation, we synthesized

- Roundtable inputs, 2022 NASEM Report, articles, presentation feedback
- $\cong 400$ comments in response to Education's request for information & resulting Amber Northerm report
- Perspectives, Insights, and recommendations from former NCES leaders; [summary](#)
- A deep dive into NCES history, including 3 major areas of legal responsibility

And we wrote *A Vision and Strategy for NCES* plus 3 supplemental papers



Project Activities - Phase II

Overall objective

- Solicit feedback on vision & strategy in order to improve them & develop buy-in
 - Build a practical roadmap for getting to the vision
 - Define & strengthen a community to advance the vision & help carry out the roadmap
 - Identify a plan to sustain the community
- Timeline of 1 year

Special thanks to Lumina Foundation & the Mellon Foundation for supporting Phase II work



The Report:

Background and Context



Report Framing & Context: Three Statutory & Reinforcing Responsibilities

1. Produce Education Statistics

Understand & report on the condition, progress, & outcomes in education to inform policy & practice.

1. Lead & Strengthen the National Education Data Ecosystem

Build the infrastructure, standards, & collaborative community that enables high quality education data.

1. Lead within the Federal Statistical System

Advance a seamless FSS so data & methods can be safely connected across domains to serve the nation.



Key Findings

1. Broad consensus on NCES's value
2. The pre-2025 model was not working well enough
3. A rare opportunity for change
4. There are real costs to what's been lost
5. The keys to modernizing are well within reach

Finding 1: Broad consensus on NCES's value

The nation needs, more than ever, a trusted public institution that can

- produce high quality and comparable education-related statistics designed for the common good, and
- enable the rest of the national education data ecosystem to remain robust and function smoothly

NCES is uniquely positioned to play this role

Finding 2: The pre-2025 model was not working well enough

- NCES was overextended trying to report on the many factors Congress requires
- Products were not timely or actionable enough, and not easy enough for end users to access
- Structural barriers limited progress on these known concerns: e.g.,
 - NCES had full mission responsibility but authority for its HR, contracting, & budget was elsewhere in ED
 - The most extreme example of statistical agency budget-to-staff and contractors-to-employees ratios
 - NCES relied on thousands of contractors but did not have sufficient staff to oversee this work.

Finding 3: A Rare Opportunity for Change Exists

- NCES's unique strategic position allows it to connect education's many data holders in the education data ecosystem to the nation's trusted federal statistical infrastructure
- NCES's dismantling allows it to be remade anew as the agency that
 - defines high-quality curation,
 - makes data providers better off by participating with it,
 - protects students and institutions through credible governance,
 - maintains national comparability without erasing local variation, &
 - produces a small number of indispensable public statistical goods from a much larger and more diverse evidence base.
- NCES can become the steward of a highly trusted national data infrastructure grounded in interoperability, transparency, privacy protection, and responsible blending of data sources.

Finding 4: There are real costs to what's been lost

- As with other statistical programs, we see NCES as core national infrastructure
- Short term, hard to see and even convey full implications of 2025 cuts
- But we can forecast many of them based on:
 - ASA's study and project tracker, which shows that many data collections are reduced in scope or discontinued (here: <https://www.amstat.org/policy-and-advocacy/nces-study-and-project-tracker/>)
 - Discontinued partnership programs
 - Disbanded expertise & capacity and diminished support & trust

Finding 5: Keys to modernizing are well within reach

- NCES's distinct combination of responsibilities positions it at the intersection of two sets of critical infrastructure:
the “vertical” **education data system** & the “horizontal” **federal statistical system**
- Its education-ecosystem role gives it legitimacy with the people and institutions that generate the data
- Its federal-statistical-system role gives it the methods, safeguards, and independence needed to turn those distributed data into trusted public knowledge
- It can bring the assets of one system to inform and advance the other, and, at the same time use them to improve statistics on the condition and progress of education in the United States

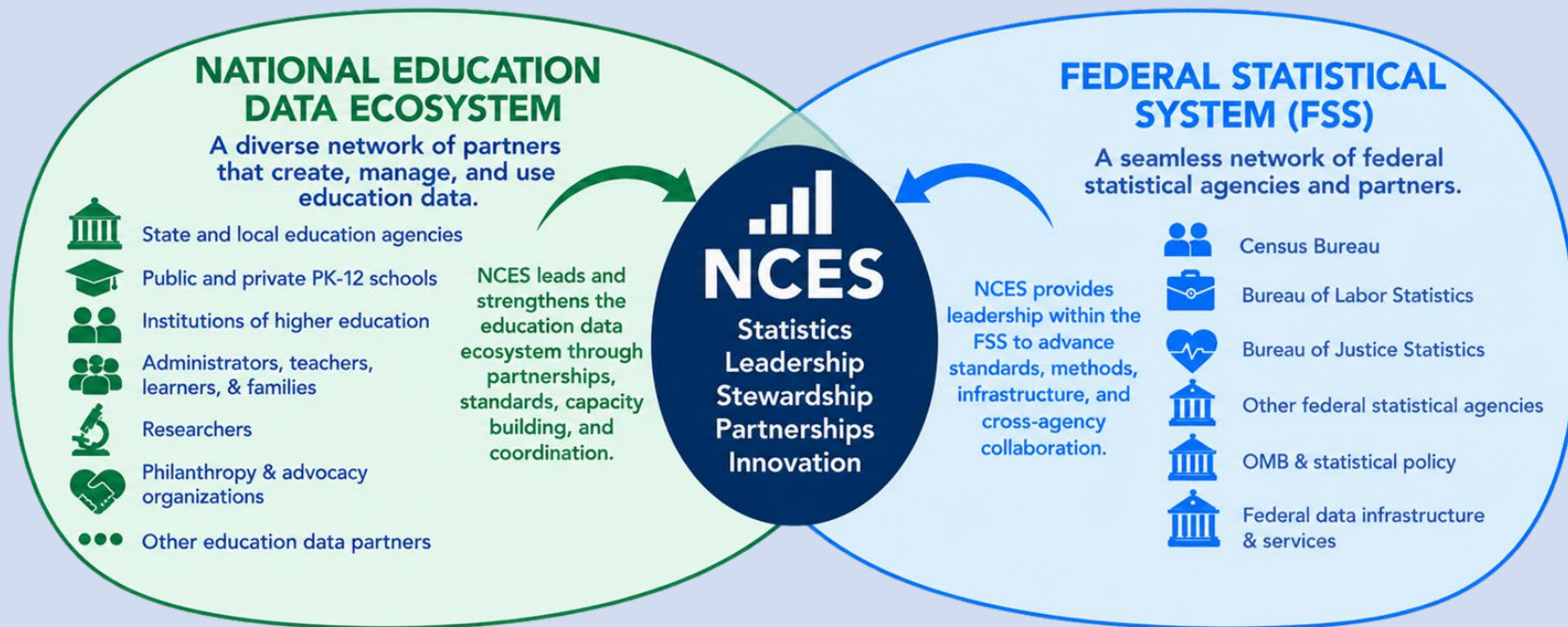


A Vision for the Future

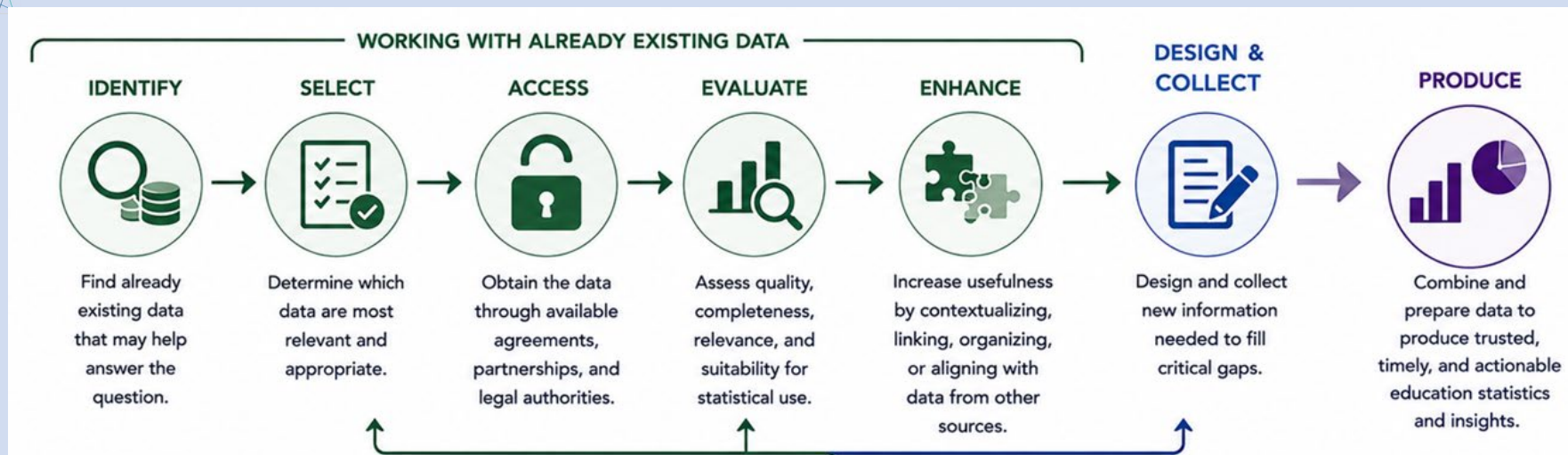
States, schools, colleges, communities and families have access to relevant, timely and objective education statistics.

Achieving this vision requires a strengthened NCES that anchors a healthy national education data ecosystem and partners closely with states—benefiting not just researchers and policymakers, but the students and families whose outcomes the data help improve.

Strategy: The education sector creates the data; the federal statistical system creates the public trust; NCES brings them together to create the nation's public knowledge base.



Strategy: NCES shifts to a curation-centric model



“Curation” does not mean building a bigger data warehouse or a more attractive portal. It means actively managing data throughout their life cycle so that users can judge what the data mean, how they were generated, whether comparisons are defensible, what they can and cannot support, and how they may be used safely.

The Strategy in Words

NCES can realize this vision by curating the nation's data with:

- the full support of federal leaders entrusted with enabling, facilitating, and supporting NCES in carrying out its responsibilities, including to ensure relevant, timely, and objective statistics for the nation;
- states and other partners in order to serve the needs of education decision-makers at every level with appropriate data security, confidentiality, and privacy protections;
- the federal statistical system to improve the nation's statistical infrastructure and address needs that no single agency can address alone; and
- modernized methods, structures, and organizational capacity to fulfill its responsibilities in tandem.



Calls to Action

The report calls on multiple actors to play a role in advancing this vision, including the following:

- Congress providing sufficient resources & conducting vigorous oversight to protect & empower NCES
- The administration launching a modernization effort for the federal statistical system, as ASA recommended here: <https://bit.ly/Re-EnvisioningNCES>.
- The Education Department implementing the Evidence Act's Trust Regulation to support NCES's rebuilding
- *****Stakeholders across the education and statistical communities building consensus around NCES's future and bringing additional voices into the conversation***** (*central to project goal of building a village!*)

Request for Feedback

The ASA is inviting feedback from the broader community, including all of you, to help shape the details of a fuller roadmap:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1p1bExew2N9wfsQ8WgRZmMPloC5FabU_OFpR_0OBMsKE/edit.

Connecting to ASA's Project Resources

The project page includes many useful offerings:

A Vision and Strategy for Remaking NCES

Three supplemental papers

1. NCES Data Collections that are Foundational to the Nation's Education Data Infrastructure
2. NCES Collaborative Relationships that Improve Data Quality and Support State and Local Data Capacity
3. NCES's Surveys that Describe K-12 Education From the Perspective of the Nation's Educators and Administrators

An NCES study and project tracker

Ways to give feedback and get involved

And more!!

