

Pandemic postpones national math, reading tests until 2022

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National reading and math tests long used to track what U.S. students know in those subjects are being postponed from next year to 2022 over concerns about whether testing would be feasible or produce valid results

during the coronavirus pandemic, the National Center for Education Statistics announced Wednesday.

The biennial National Assessment of Educational Progress evaluations used for the Nation's Report Card were slated early next year for hundreds of thousands of the country's fourth and eighth graders. But widespread remote learning and health protocols would have added big complications and costs because the model uses shared equipment and sends outside proctors to conduct the testing in schools.

Pushing ahead with testing in 2021 runs the risk of spending tens of millions of dollars and still not getting the data necessary to produce a reliable, comparable picture of state and national student performance, NCES Commissioner James Woodworth said in [a statement](#). By law, they would have to wait another two years for the next chance at testing.

Testing in 2022 instead "would be more likely to provide valuable—and valid—data about student achievement in the wake of COVID-19 to support effective policy, research, and resource allocation," the leaders of the National Assessment Governing Board said in a separate statement supporting the move.

The nonpartisan Council of Chief State School Officers also supported the NAEP postponement.

Ohio Department of Education spokesperson Mandy Minick called it "entirely understandable" given the extensive disruptions schools are facing.

"I think we're all on the same page about trying to stress health and safety," she said.

However, the decision also delays data that could help show how the

pandemic is impacting learning.

Woodworth suggested that results from states' annual tests—generally conducted using schools' own equipment and staff, and perhaps therefore more feasible than the national tests—could help bridge the gap and provide a state-level look at the impact. But the NAEP postponement might have ripple effects in the debate about whether those state tests even happen in spring 2021.

State tests, which are federally mandated and are used more for accountability purposes, were canceled last spring under federal waivers as the pandemic surged. The current administration under Republican President Donald Trump had indicated states shouldn't expect to be granted another round of waivers if they request them, but it's an issue likely to come up again after Democratic President-elect Joe Biden's administration takes office.

"If the national assessment can't be done in '21, states are legitimately going to say, 'Well, why are we expected to test in '21?'" said Chester Finn, a former chair of the National Assessment Governing Board and president emeritus of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute who advocates results-based accountability.

If states get to skip the tests again this spring, that could create a multiyear gap in data that helps inform other decisions and identify concerns, Finn said.

"If you're not held accountable for your results, or there's no way to do it because there's no information about your results, then all sorts of bad things happen to the education system and to the kids in the education system," he said. "We sort of go back to the pre-accountability days, when, you know, the only thing you knew about a kid's learning was the teachers' grades, and the only thing you knew about a school's

performance was what the principal said it was, and nobody had data on gaps between different groups of kids."

The postponement of national tests is understandable but makes having state tests in 2021 "a moral imperative," the chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor, Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., and the top Democrat on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, Sen. Patty Murray of Washington state, said in a [joint statement](#).

"In order for our nation to recover and rebuild from the pandemic, we must first understand the magnitude of learning loss that has impacted students across the country," they wrote. "That cannot happen without assessment data."

In [letters to those lawmakers](#), Education Secretary Betsy DeVos also expressed strong support for proceeding with state assessments next spring and said states "have ample time to plan for successful [test](#) administration tailored to their unique circumstances."

Her letters also noted that because NAEP is federally mandated, Congress would need to sign off on postponing the national testing for a year.

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