



NAEP Chief Put on Leave by Trump Administration

Researchers say the move could further weaken the agency's information-gathering abilities

By [Evie Blad](#) & [Sarah Schwartz](#) — February 25, 2025 4 min read

The federal official who oversees a key measure of the nation's educational progress was abruptly placed on administrative leave by the Trump administration Monday, a move that follows the [sudden cancellation of millions of dollars of projects](#) at the U.S. Department of Education's research arm.

Former President Joe Biden appointed Peggy Carr, a career employee at the National Center for Education Statistics for more than 30 years, to a six-year term as commissioner of the agency in 2021. The Education Department's press office confirmed that Carr was placed on leave, but did not respond to a request for further comment Tuesday.

NCES collects and reports data on academic achievement, the educator workforce, and the condition of schools. It's best known for administering the National Assessment of Educational Progress, often called the nation's report card, which has tracked the educational progress of students since the 1970s and is frequently cited in debates over education policy.

Carr's suspension, which came with no explanation, sparked concern among researchers and education leaders about disruption at the agency, which has long been respected for careful, nonpartisan work, and the possible erosion of carefully collected year-over-year data about students and schools.

In addition to NAEP, NCES administers the U.S. portion of international surveys of students' math and science abilities, various longitudinal surveys, and a common core of data on the country's public schools.

These data provide an "anchor" for research and analysis, said Thomas Dee, a professor at the Stanford University Graduate School of Education, who called Carr's suspension "outrageous."

"That [data] allows people to have different opinions, but not necessarily different facts," he said.

Because the United States has a highly decentralized system of schooling, "creating coherent, aligned, comprehensive data on how well that decentralized system is doing

really requires an active federal role,” Dee said. “I worry about the broader data infrastructure that allows us to have evidence-grounded conversations.”

Carr’s leave comes as the Education Department faces disruption

Carr’s leave comes as President Donald Trump takes an intentionally disruptive approach to education. He has pledged to [dismantle the Education Department](#), criticized public schools, and campaigned on [private school choice](#).

NCES has enjoyed bipartisan support in the past. But some, like former Institute of Education Sciences Director Mark Schneider, who was appointed during the first Trump administration, have said the agency [should work to provide useful data more quickly](#). (NCES is a subdivision of IES.)

In conversations about school funding and using public funds to send children to private schools, Trump’s allies often [cite the NAEP data](#) Carr is responsible for collecting and reporting.

The Trump administration has said that NAEP would not be affected by a swath of spending cuts to the Education Department that now total close to \$1 billion. But soon after making that pledge, the agency [canceled a planned spring administration of a test](#) that measures the math and reading skills of 17-year-olds.

The [most recent scores from the main NAEP test](#), released Jan. 29, showed academic struggles for 4th and 8th grade students in the wake of the pandemic.

In [interviews with Education Week in 2022](#) and [2023](#), Carr talked about plans to adapt NAEP in part in response to infrastructure issues illuminated by the pandemic.

Developing a “device agnostic” test would allow students to take it on different kinds of devices, like Chromebooks or school-issued laptops, she said, and adaptive testing could allow for researchers to collect more detailed information about the capabilities of very high-performing and very low-performing students.

The agency also developed more sophisticated indicators of students’ socioeconomic status, included in 2024 assessments, so researchers could better understand the effects of poverty on achievement.

During the pandemic, NCES quickly developed a periodic “pulse” survey of school administrators to gauge how their schools responded to the crisis.

“Everything has been in turmoil since COVID—it’s just complete chaos for almost any industry you can think of—and education really took the brunt of it,” Carr said in 2023. “People don’t realize what it means when your education system globally is not in place and it impacts everything else, so we have been busy as soon as we could get in the field collecting data.”

Carr's colleagues highlight expertise, integrity

When Michael Casserly was the executive director of the Council of Great City Schools, he worked with Carr to develop the Trial Urban District Assessment, which allows qualifying big-city districts to volunteer to report their NAEP results separately, providing a clearer picture of their progress and challenges.

Carr's "integrity was unquestioned, and her expertise was second to none," said Casserly, who now serves as a senior advisor for the organization.

"I think it's a travesty that Peggy would be put in this position," he said. "She is a real asset to the United States government and to the American people—a person of enormous integrity, honesty, and balance."

"She has worked for all manner of secretaries and administrations that are both conservative and liberal ... I have never seen her act differently with one set of folks than she does another," Casserly said.