Policies, Programs, and Implementation (PPI) Standing Committee Meeting Summary
Wednesday, April 20, 2022

Welcome and Introductions

PPI Chair Linda Jenkins, Arkansas Department of Education, and PPI Vice Chair Stephen Gervais, San Bernardino Unified School District (CA), introduced themselves and welcomed new members to PPI.

The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic's Impact on Schooling and Teaching

Linda invited members to consider how the COVID-19 pandemic led state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) to introduce and expand alternative models of schooling and how these shifting models have influenced agencies' data collection efforts and brought changes to the teaching profession. Goals for the meeting included

- sharing information about the effects of these changing models;
- learning from one another and identifying best practices for data collections; and
- discussing how changes to the teaching profession have affected members' agencies.

Discussion

Alternative Model of Schooling

Members began by discussing how their agencies changed data collection processes because of alternative schooling models and the challenges faced while adapting to these models. State and local responses to these challenges included

- examining the percentage of time spent in virtual learning by school type (elementary, middle, or high) and poverty level;
- adding a learning model element to student demographic data, as well as a code to designate students learning remotely due to quarantine;
- expanding the daily attendance collection beyond reporting negative attendance;
- collecting information on the mode of instruction (for example, capturing if students receive in-person and remote instruction on the same day);
- adding a new student-level digital resource data collection to replace a prior school-level digital equity data collection;
- developing a range of different approaches for parent surveys; and
- using membership rather than attendance as a metric to secure funding, while adding a new data field to distinguish between attendance-validated (in-person) and learner-validated (remote) programs.

Members discussed best practices their agencies developed to adapt effectively to schooling changes during the pandemic. These included

- surveys via multiple modalities, delivered by school principals to improve response rates;
- diverse measures to ensure the privacy of students learning remotely (study spaces, weighing the use of video cameras, strategizing to reach students in areas with low internet coverage); and
- standardized statewide guidance on attendance, engagement, and absenteeism.

Changes to the Teaching Profession

Drastic changes that affected education models during the pandemic also affected the teaching profession. Members discussed how these changes affected their agencies:

- Some districts reported challenges with instructional models where teachers were instructing in-person and virtual students at the same time. Of these, some were able to mitigate the challenge by bringing on long-term substitute teachers to serve as quarantine teachers, which provided individual or small-group help for students who needed extra attention. Other districts managed challenges around attendance by switching to an engagement-based model, basing attendance on assignments submitted.
- Some states found it useful to leave a certain amount of flexibility between state and district plans and policies (for example, when deciding whether to use synchronous instruction as a prerequisite for funding or altering grading models to change "failure" to "incomplete learning"), giving the districts freedom to adapt to their circumstances.
- Some states synchronized testing windows statewide and standardized the tests themselves, easing the reporting burden posed by student transitions between in-person and virtual learning, at the cost of some autonomy at the district and school levels. Other states maintained more autonomy by setting up education service districts under a statewide distance learning umbrella to assist smaller districts with virtual options.

Next Steps and Future Meeting Planning

Members concluded the meeting with a discussion of potential topics for the virtual PPI meetings in June and July. Suggested topics:

- Common data definitions needed for pandemic preparedness
- Building relationships with other agencies within the bounds of privacy laws
- U.S. Department of Education (ED) assessment and accountability requirements
- Data interoperability policies
- Measuring and understanding teacher shortages
- Alternative measures of socio-economic status
- The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Spatially Interpolated Demographic Estimates (SIDE) Project[1]
- ED Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC)[2] presentation

[1] https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Economic/NeighborhoodPoverty
[2] https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/