National Education Statistics Agenda Committee (NESAC)
Meeting Summary
Tuesday, July 12, 2022

NESAC Committee Kick-off

NESAC Chair Gunes Kaplan, Nevada Department of Education, and NESAC Vice Chair Laura Hansen, Metro Nashville Public Schools (TN), welcomed members to the meeting and led the group in introductions. Gunes briefly reviewed major activities and discussions from the 2021 NESAC virtual meeting and reviewed the 2022 meeting agenda.

Opening Session Follow-up: Cybersecurity

Gunes led a discussion following the cybersecurity presentation by Steven Hernandez, U.S. Department of Education (ED). The main takeaway from the talk was that cybersecurity is a critical topic for all state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs), but agencies often find it challenging to maintain the latest cybersecurity best practices needed to counteract ever-evolving threats.

Several members noted that it is difficult for SEAs and LEAs to keep pace with developments in cybersecurity. Even in the time since last year's summer Forum meeting, security and privacy measures that were at the forefront in 2021 are already out of date and can be circumvented. Members suggested that the Forum could consider developing training materials but cautioned that they would have to be regularly updated to account for frequent changes in the field.

Members detailed ways in which their agencies are working to meet the challenge of providing ease of online access for teachers, students, and staff while also protecting data and enforcing cybersecurity policies. For example, take-home devices for students are vulnerable to unsecured internet, downloaded malware, and risky use by people other than the student. Members detailed ways in which their agencies have found success in providing robust, up-to-date cybersecurity, including

- earmarking funds for a dedicated cybersecurity officer on staff or a centralized information technology (IT) department;
- centralizing LEA cybersecurity expertise and responsibilities in regional technology centers;
- providing security training that meets the needs of data users; for example, by explaining the importance of protecting passwords and using multi-factor authentication (MFA);
- developing cybersecurity incident response plans; and
- conducting mock phishing email exercises and offering virtual badges for staff who successfully identify phishing emails.

Expertise and attention are the common factors across all proposed solutions—an agency's cybersecurity cannot be assumed but must be prioritized and carried out by experts.

School Courses for the Exchange of Data (SCED) Working Group Update

Susan Williams, Virginia Department of Education, provided an update on the SCED Working Group. SCED is a voluntary, common classification system for prekindergarten through 12th grade school courses. It is based on a five-digit course code that provides a basic structure for

classifying course content. Additional elements and attributes provide descriptive information about each course. SCED is used by staff in SEAs and LEAs. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) uses SCED for the secondary transcript studies. SCED is entirely voluntary, and it is designed to be flexible enough that education agencies can adapt it to meet their needs. As a result, SCED implementation varies.

The SCED Working Group is currently developing SCED Version 10, which will be published this fall. Version 10 will include updated and new courses in several areas, including three new courses focused on Data Science and Data Literacy. Susan explained that SCED updates are based on the needs of SEAs, LEAs, and NCES, and she encouraged Forum members to send their suggestions for courses to the working group and to respond to requests from the working group for feedback on proposed updates to SCED. She also encouraged members to visit the Forum website to see the many resources the working group has developed to assist with SCED implementation and use.

NESAC members from states including Connecticut, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Michigan, Washington, Montana, Iowa, Virginia, and Vermont noted that their agencies currently use SCED. Some use all SCED codes, while others use only certain SCED subject areas. In some states, SCED is used for both SEA and LEA course coding, while other states use SCED only at the SEA level.

Wednesday, July 13, 2022

Data Standards

Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) Reporting Focused Working Group Update

Georgia Hughes-Webb, West Virginia Department of Education, provided an update on the CRDC Reporting Focused Working Group. In 2018, the Forum released the *Forum Guide to Reporting Civil Rights Data* (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2017168.asp), which presents a variety of effective methods through which LEAs report civil rights data to ED's Office for Civil Rights. The guide includes an overview of the CRDC, a discussion of the challenges and opportunities in reporting civil rights data, an explanation of the CRDC reporting process, and six case studies that examine how education agencies report civil rights data. Since the publication of the 2018 guide, more SEAs have begun supporting LEAs with CRDC reporting, including reporting CRDC data for their LEAs. The Forum determined that a supplement to the original document was needed and convened the CRDC Reporting Focused Working Group to develop a supplement that will identify best practices and include several detailed case studies from states that report the CRDC for their LEAs.

Race/Ethnicity Reporting

Gunes led a discussion on race and ethnicity data reporting, beginning with a mention of the Forum's two publications on this subject: *Managing an Identity Crisis: Forum Guide to Implementing New Federal Race and Ethnicity Categories* (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2008802.asp) and the *Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Disaggregated Data on Racial/Ethnic Subgroups* (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2017017.asp). Gunes used the following questions to frame the ensuing discussion:

- What approaches are agencies using to collect race and ethnicity data?

- Is your agency only using the federal categories, or are you also collecting more detailed data on racial/ethnic subgroups? If your agency collects more detailed data, how are the data aggregated for federal reporting?
- What are the challenges of implementing more detailed racial/ethnic data? How can we help agencies overcome these challenges?

The states participating in the discussion were divided when it comes to using federal categories or collecting data according to a wider selection of categories at the local level. Some states only use the federal categories and see no benefit in collecting more detailed data, while others collect expanded categories at the local level and then aggregate the data to meet standards for federal reporting. In certain states and territories, more detailed racial/ethnic data are needed to provide targeted supports to students. Discussion points included the following:

- Current federal racial/ethnic categories do not always align with how students and their families identify. Even the terms "race" and "ethnicity" themselves may cause issues in reporting; the two are not the same thing, but the distinction between them is not widely known.
- Students and their families sometimes do not wish to identify their race/ethnicity, which creates a difficult situation for education agencies that are required to report these data.
- More districts are shifting away from relying on racial/ethnic data to learn what they need to know about their student populations and are instead gathering data on language (first language, language spoken at home, preferred language for written correspondence). This avoids some of the sensitivities that may arise around racial/ethnic identification and can provide a more accurate picture of cultural diversity.
- Agencies have found that it is helpful to provide families with plain language explanations of why race/ethnicity data are collected and how they are used. Whenever possible, these explanations should be provided in the parents' language to minimize language barriers.
- Race/ethnicity data can be used with other data to help identify areas of educational inequity and to offer targeted programs and interventions to promote equity.

Gender Reporting

Gunes led a discussion about the reporting of gender data, which has become a more complex issue for educational agencies in recent years. Gunes asked members to consider how SEAs and LEAs collect gender data, how their approaches have changed in recent years, if they collect more than two binary gender categories, and if they have any challenges or best practices to share. Discussion points included the following:

- Some agencies have added a non-binary option (sometimes coded as "X" or "N") to gender data collections, while others continue to limit collections to two binary options. Some SEAs and LEAs are following the guidance of other agencies in the state on when and how to add a third gender category; for instance, one SEA added "N" for non-binary after the state's Department of Motor Vehicles approved and implemented a similar option for driver's licenses. Elsewhere, SEAs and LEAs are observing how gender data are handled at the postsecondary level before making decisions for K–12 schools.
- Some agencies' gender data reporting options are constrained by state law. In multiple states, gender data reported by schools must correspond with the legal name and gender contained in a student's vital records.

- Due to the limited number of data categories for gender reporting, the data suppression required to maintain student privacy constricts the data that can be reported. Agencies that gather data on non-binary gender are often barred from reporting these data because the comparatively small number of respondents in that category triggers data suppression rules.

Common Education Data Standards (CEDS)
Laura delivered a presentation on CEDS (https://ceds.ed.gov/). After an initial overview of CEDS graphics and an introductory video showing the versatility of CEDS and its benefits to education agencies, Laura took the group on a live tour through the CEDS website. She first explained CEDS accounts, which allow users to save their data maps and other work. She then focused on LEA use of CEDS, demonstrated the Connect and Align tools, and discussed the possibilities CEDS offers in matters of reporting, comparing, and mapping data. CEDS is particularly useful for answering data requests, and it contains data elements that are aligned with ED reporting requirements. In addition, CEDS' standardized elements are helpful to agencies in shaping their collection efforts; agencies that are looking to implement new elements or update existing elements can look to CEDS for information on what other states and districts are using.

NESAC Election
Laura Hansen was nominated as the 2022–23 NESAC Chair and Adrian L. Peoples, Delaware Department of Education was nominated as the 2022–23 NESAC Vice Chair.

Thursday, July 14, 2022

Working Group Updates
Education Indicators Working Group Update
Susan Williams, Virginia Department of Education, provided an update on the Education Indicators Working Group. Since the publication of the *Forum Guide to Education Indicators* (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2005802.asp) in 2005, many advancements in education have impacted indicators, including changes to data systems (such as improved longitudinal data systems), federal data collections and accountability systems, legislation, mandatory public reporting, privacy protections, and data security. The purpose of the resource currently in development is to provide timely and useful information on education indicators, how their collection and use have changed over time, and how agencies use them strategically. This new resource highlights best practices for using indicators, adjustments over time to the collection and use of indicators, shifts in types of relevant indicators, and what possibilities LEAs and SEAs see for the effective use of indicators in the future. The primary audience for this publication is staff in local, state, and federal education agencies whose responsibilities include any aspect of collecting, reporting, or analyzing the data used to create education indicators.

Digital Equity Working Group Update
Cheryl L. VanNoy, Saint Louis Public Schools (MO), provided an update on the Digital Equity Working Group. The Forum convened the Digital Equity Working Group following the Forum's discussions at the summer 2021 meeting. Digital inequity has been a long-standing issue in the education community, and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic further exacerbated the already broad gap between those who have adequate access to computing devices and the

Internet and those who do not. The working group developed the *Forum Guide to Digital Equity* (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2022098.asp) to help education agencies close digital equity gaps by collecting comparable data, using those data to provide devices and sufficient access to the Internet to students, and collaborating with stakeholders. The resource defines digital equity, explains the importance of having comparable, high-quality digital equity data, and discusses how those data can be used to identify issues, prioritize action, and create new programs or sustain existing efforts to address digital inequities.

Topics from the Floor

Gunes opened the floor for members to discuss topics of interest that were not addressed during planned conversations. Members discussed the following topics:

- Learning loss remains a topic of interest for committee members, particularly in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 and its effects on student attendance, performance, and engagement will be relevant to academic data for years to come. Members noted alarming dips in attendance and enrollment when education went virtual; many of these students did not return when their schools decided to return to in-person learning.
- Some members voiced interest in learning about/discussing the collection and reporting of pre-kindergarten data.
- Some agencies have concerns about the process of reintegrating with federal accountability systems after special COVID-19 measures have lapsed or been eliminated; these measures span from adjusting policies to receiving federal accountability waivers for a set period.

NESAC Committee Business

Steering Committee Business/Report

Gunes reported that the Steering Committee discussed the joint sessions and meetings of the Forum's three standing committees. The Steering Committee approved a slate of nominated Forum and Committee officers, which will be voted upon by the full Forum during the Closing Session.

Meeting Review/Future Planning

Gunes thanked members for their participation and led a review of the meeting and discussion of plans for future NESAC meetings.

Members were satisfied with the way this year's online meetings progressed and praised the openness of the committee, which allowed for candid discussions.

Members shared the following topics for future NESAC meetings:

- dual credit and dual enrollment data tracking;
- industry certification data management;
- strategies for tracking and reporting data on academic return on investment (ROI);
- per pupil funding calculations;
- data system architecture age and renewal;
- data governance and data strategy;
- student mobility, especially data anomalies related to COVID-19;

- personalized learning plan data; and
- social-emotional learning data, multi-tiered system of supports, professional learning communities, and tracking referrals and interventions.