Policies, Programs, and Implementation Committee (PPI) Meeting Summary
Tuesday, July 12, 2022

PPI Committee Kick-off

PPI Chair Linda Jenkins, Arkansas Department of Education, and PPI Vice Chair Stephen Gervais, San Bernardino City Unified School District (CA), welcomed members to the meeting and led the group in introductions. Linda briefly reviewed major activities and discussions from the 2021 PPI virtual meeting and reviewed the 2022 meeting agenda.

Opening Session Follow-up: Cybersecurity

Linda led a discussion following the cybersecurity presentation by Steven Hernandez, U.S. Department of Education (ED). Members discussed the usefulness and timeliness of the presentation, with several noting their intentions to share the information with their agencies. They also shared thoughts about recognizing data security vulnerabilities, mediating pushback regarding security measures such as two-factor authentication, and ensuring that vendors comply with contract requirements for data security.

Members discussed recent challenges related to cybersecurity, such as ensuring necessary and regularly updated training for all staff who deal with data. Staff training on what to look for and how to recognize potential problems is an important measure all agencies can take. Several members noted that some local education agencies (LEAs) need more support and resources to meet cybersecurity requirements.

Education agencies also emphasize the importance of cybersecurity with their vendors and work with them to guarantee that data are used and shared appropriately. Security compliance audits can ensure that all vendor activities adhere to contract language. Data privacy agreements and clear requirements for data destruction are also key; the use of consistent standards across vendors would help improve privacy and security. One data consortium is currently working to establish a global standard.

COVID-Related Data Standards

Linda led a discussion about the ways data collection and reporting have been influenced by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The members focused on defining attendance and engagement, gathering assessment data, and monitoring student mobility. They also discussed their agencies' capacities for adjusting policies related to data collection.

Collecting and reporting attendance and engagement data has been difficult for many state education agencies (SEAs) and LEAs since the beginning of the pandemic, particularly for remote or hybrid learning models. Definitions of these concepts vary widely: one location could require submission of a single assignment per week, whereas another could require students to check in hourly. With both accountability and funding connected to these data, members voiced concerns about the lack of consistency. The *Forum Guide to Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Data in Virtual and Hybrid Learning Models* (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2021058.asp) is intended to assist agencies in responding to the current need for these data during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as future scenarios, such as

courses with blended/hybrid learning models or natural disaster situations in which extended virtual education is required.

SEAs and LEAs have also worked on ways to effectively assess student progress under varying learning models. Some were moving toward assessing level of mastery (as opposed to traditional grading systems and seat time) prior to the pandemic but found their efforts complicated by sudden shifts to remote learning or hybrid models. Members noted that the pandemic has disrupted the traditional processes for data collection, reporting, and use. Some agencies have also faced concerns about the quality and completeness of instruction, particularly in math.

Members discussed their agencies' efforts to track student mobility during the pandemic. In some locations, these data are used to ensure transportation for students back to their home schools even as they move around. Some agencies have also tracked "continuously enrolled" students (based on the number of days present) as a separate subgroup to provide more context about student progress during the pandemic. It is necessary to accurately define the concept of mobility, as student location can vary due to displacement from natural disasters, increases in homelessness, and other causes. Without standard definitions, data like state-to-state comparisons are less useful and may be inappropriate.

The group ended this discussion by considering their agencies' capacity to further revise data collection policies in the wake of COVID-19 and voicing concerns they have faced regarding COVID-19 data sharing. Members noted that these changes will have to be made, regardless of their capacity to do so; therefore, agency resources will need to be targeted towards fulfilling new requirements and priorities. Additionally, the need for shared data across agencies during the pandemic (such as those shared with health departments for contact tracing or tracking of positivity rates) required education agencies to be vigilant about data privacy requirements.

Wednesday, July 13, 2022

National Center for Education Statistics Spatially Interpolated Demographic Estimates (NCES SIDE) Project

Stephen introduced Doug Geverdt, NCES, who delivered a presentation on the NCES SIDE Project (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Economic/NeighborhoodPoverty).

Education programs tend to rely on indicators of free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) eligibility to identify financial needs for students and schools. This measure has several limitations, including misidentification that results in over-participation, limited capacity for income verification, and changes to the program that affect data comparability and usability. Multiple measures of poverty in and around schools are needed to provide more effective and accurate data. The SIDE project is creating a demographic indicator for poverty using geospatial mapping. Early explorations using the model have investigated whether states have student address data, routinely geocode these data, and use spatial data for analysis and decision-making.

Forum members engaged Doug in a discussion that addressed the following:

- using geospatial data to identify economic need and direct resources more precisely;
- developing newer and more accurate models to determine socioeconomic status;

- avoiding undercounts when data from traditional sources (such as the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey) may not be complete; and
- helping stakeholders understand the nuances of complicated data.

Alternative Measures of Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Linda led a discussion about alternative measures of SES. Though FRPL has been traditionally used as a proxy for SES in data management and education research, it is not an ideal measure. Many SEAs and LEAs are working to define more precise measures (or combinations of measures) that would allow them to better target resources to students and schools.

Members discussed potential measures such as highest educational attainment in household, single parent household, students in foster care, homelessness, and the ratio of attendance to subsidized housing. Homeownership, though often considered an indicator of relative wealth, has become more complicated, as families in some areas choose to rent their homes due to unstable housing markets, frequency of relocation, and other factors. Whereas higher rates of rentals may suggest greater poverty in some places, in other locations rentals are common and do not necessarily provide a good indication of SES.

Many agencies face challenges in determining and collecting economic data. Members acknowledged that families do not always submit the information necessary to allow for more accuracy. Additionally, student-level data may be more useful for some purposes, but school-level data are used to direct funding. SEAs and LEAs may receive requests from other agencies such as public health, raising concerns about privacy and data burdens. As education agencies work to determine potential new measures of SES, they must be ready to address stakeholders' concerns about funding changes.

The *Forum Guide to Alternative Measures of Socioeconomic Status in Education Data Systems* (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2015158.asp) provides eight plausible alternative measures of SES to help readers better understand the implications of collecting and interpreting a range of SES-related data in education agencies. New measures of SES, as well as new collections, will need to be funded and supported to be successful. Additionally, agreement by different agencies on identifying SES will improve data consistency and transferability. Reframing the concept and collection of SES data may be challenging, but is likely to lead to more useful information and greater support for students and schools.

Gender Data

Linda led a discussion about how education agencies are navigating the collection of gender data, as definitions and categories of gender are modified and expanded. Some agencies now include options for nonbinary or not defined. Responses of nonbinary have risen steadily in some locations, particularly if the data are collected via an anonymous survey. In collections based on parent reports, many locations require a change to official documents before using the nonbinary designation. These documents can be updated by parents, or by students over the age of 18 in some locations. Data must be suppressed when the number of nonbinary students at the school level is below the minimum number needed to provide statistically sound data while protecting the personally identifiable information (PII) of individual students. LEAs may also choose not to provide denominators in reported data so that students cannot be individually identified.

Accountability Data

Linda led a discussion about accountability data and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected these collections. Issues such as skip year growth, longitudinal data, student-teacher ratios, and funding have challenged SEAs and LEAs as they manage data collection and reporting throughout and beyond the pandemic. Management of these concerns varies among agencies based on the nature of states' waivers. Many locales did not collect typical assessment data in 2020 and 2021, and those that did collect some sort of assessment data recognize that they may be skewed and cannot be directly comparable to other years. Waivers and modifications to collections allowed some agencies to better contextualize the data collected in those years for their stakeholders. At present, many agencies are returning to more standard accountability data collections.

Members discussed lessons learned from the challenges provided by the pandemic and its effects on data collection. These lessons relate to being prepared for disruptive events and having a system in place to address them. For example, when facing a crisis, agencies can have triggers in place to reset baselines or adjust accountability rules.

PPI Election

Stephen Gervais was nominated as the 2022–23 PPI Chair and Jonathan Wiens, Oregon Department of Education, was nominated as the 2022–23 PPI Vice Chair.

Thursday, July 14, 2022

Teacher Shortage Data

Linda led a discussion about teacher shortages and how SEAs and LEAs may be collecting related data. Agencies are facing shortages overall, but particularly in math, science, and special education. Efforts to collect quality data about shortages vary, with some states creating estimates from the numbers of teachers teaching out of field or with provisional licenses. With the prevalence of new or provisional teachers in many places, states are also collecting data to ensure that these teachers have the training and resources they need to be successful.

Recent shortages have illuminated some cases of disconnections in data communication between SEAs and LEAs. SEAs that do not collect specific, current data about shortages from LEAs must instead rely on various methods to estimate vacancies. These include pulling data from hiring sites, comparing first and last day employment numbers, reviewing certifications, and working with vendors on ways to identify shortages.

The increased challenges facing teachers during and beyond the pandemic inspired many teachers to move to other fields or retire; members expect these shortages to continue, at least temporarily.

Discipline Data Working Group Update

Bradley McMillen, Wake County Public School System (NC), provided an update on the Discipline Data Working Group. The Forum convened the working group to develop a new resource that will help education agencies collect, manage, report, and use high-quality, timely

data about discipline. The new resource will discuss why discipline data are collected and how these data are used to support students and improve learning environments. It will include key considerations for tracking data, best practices for using and reporting the data, and case studies from education agencies that have implemented successful data practices. The resource will also provide information on changes in discipline data over time and the importance of reviewing data in context; for example, understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on longitudinal data. The working group is currently developing a draft of the resource that will be sent to the Forum for review and feedback prior to publication.

Topics from the Floor

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

- researching the impact of COVID-19 on schools and student performance;
- communicating data from 2020 forward with stakeholders and explaining nuances of adjusted collections; and
- addressing and increasing data literacy of stakeholders. Operational and instructional training for staff is needed, along with building skills in interpreting and moving forward with data.

Members also discussed strategies and ideas for disseminating Forum resources more broadly. Smaller Forum resources released over time would be appreciated, particularly as professional development time has become limited. Potential new means of communication include breaking concepts down, providing summaries of key issues, and using Forum communications.

PPI Committee Business

Steering Committee Business/Report

Linda 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

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

Members shared the following topics for future PPI meetings:

- continuing discussion on alternative measures of SES;
- data literacy for staff and other stakeholders (a data literacy course, similar to the Forum's data quality, data ethics, and data visualization courses (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/online_courses.asp), would be of interest);
- data justice (described as making "invisible" students visible, and ensuring data are not used in ways that hurt students or families); and
- alternative staffing strategies and the efficacy of various retention interventions.