National Education Statistics Agenda Committee (NESAC) Meeting Summary

Monday, July 12, 2021

NESAC Kickoff

NESAC Chair Cheryl L. VanNoy (Saint Louis Public Schools, Missouri) and NESAC Vice Chair Gunes Kaplan (Nevada Department of Education) welcomed members to the meeting and introduced themselves. NESAC participants introduced themselves, noted their home agency/organization and how long they have been attending Forum meetings, and shared a recent success in their professional or personal life. Cheryl briefly reviewed major activities and discussions from the 2020 NESAC virtual meeting and reviewed the 2021 meeting agenda.

Opening Session Follow-up: Cybersecurity

Cheryl L. VanNoy led a follow-up discussion on topics introduced by Steven Hernandez (U.S. Department of Education) during his presentation on cybersecurity. Members appreciated the updated information and links Steven shared, and noted that the information will be helpful to share with colleagues in their agencies. Key takeaways included the following:

- Cybersecurity concerns need to be taken into consideration with all different types of software and platforms.
- Members learned key information that can be applied in their day-to-day work, including the importance of password length, testing backups, and moving to zero-trust architecture, in which everything must be verified. Members reported that their agencies are implementing multi-factor authentication on many systems.
- Cybersecurity has become a permanent topic of discussion among education agencies.
- Agencies face the challenge of communicating the importance of training everyone in an agency to value security over convenience.
- The flow of communication about cybersecurity within an organization should be documented. Some agencies have implemented incident command systems to manage any cybersecurity incidents with a core team and established processes for drafting, reviewing, and sending communications. It is important to practice using the command system regularly.
- NESAC members foresee an increase in training over the next five years, with a focus on ensuring that all users of agency systems, including students, fully understand their cybersecurity responsibilities. Agencies will need to budget funding to ensure that any new technology can be kept secure.
- Jefferson County Public Schools, Kentucky has a cross-department team focused on cybersecurity and a website on digital privacy and cybersecurity: https://www.jefferson.kyschools.us/department/technology-division/information-technology/digital-privacy-and-cyber-security.

State and Local Education Agency (SEA and LEA) Report Cards Discussion

Cheryl L. VanNoy and Gunes Kaplan invited members to share their agencies' approaches to SEA and LEA report cards. Cheryl and Gunes then facilitated a discussion on how the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has impacted the information shared in SEA and LEA report cards. Members reported the following:

- Data reports may be incomplete due to changes in how some data, such as attendance, were collected and reported during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In addition to changes in attendance data, some agencies have seen drastic reductions in the amount of disciplinary incidents reported during the COVID-19 pandemic. Disciplinary incidents are now often related to inappropriate technology use, instead of infractions such as fighting.
- It will be important for agencies to be transparent about why data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic may be different. Many SEAs and LEAs are planning to include language on their report card websites explaining how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted data.
- Mason City School District, Ohio provides families with a Quality Profile that provides narrative information in addition to data. An example is available online: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ByWfLYCui1U1b1qOySsNoo3nFOPA9GnD/view.
- Some agencies are considering making COVID-19 pandemic-related changes permanent, such as changes to grading standards. This will impact data comparability.
- Agencies that use National School Lunch Program (NSLP) eligibility in their data reporting were impacted when eligibility was expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic. This underscores the importance of collecting economic status data separately from NSLP data. The *Forum Guide to Alternative Measures of Socioeconomic Status in Education Data Systems* (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2015158.asp) provides "encyclopedia-type" entries for eight plausible alternative measures of socioeconomic status (SES) to help readers better understand the implications of collecting and interpreting a range of SES-related data in education agencies.
- SEAs and LEAs are implementing and expanding efforts to collect data on student and educator access to technology devices. Many NESAC members noted that merely measuring access to devices is insufficient to determine if students are able to engage in virtual learning. Related questions include whether or not the student has access to high-speed internet, and if not, if there are measures that can be taken to give them access.
- Agencies are taking different approaches to determining when a student must complete all requirements to be counted as a graduate; for example, allowing a student in summer school to be considered part of the previous May's graduating class. Some agencies are changing their rules as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tuesday, July 13, 2021

COVID-19 Pandemic Related Learning Loss Discussion

Cheryl L. VanNoy gave members the opportunity to respond to questions about learning loss related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These questions addressed collection and analysis of learning loss data, impact on student growth data, and how states and districts are addressing and planning to mitigate learning loss.

1. **How is your agency collecting and analyzing data to measure learning loss?**
    - Efforts to measure learning loss include proceeding as usual and offering screening assessments at the beginning of the school year, offering social-emotional assessments in addition to reading and math assessments, and offering LEA-level screening in addition to or in place of SEA screening.

- Some states avoid a focus on loss, including loss-related terminology, and have not been advocating any measurement of learning loss. Instead, the focus is on accelerating students from where they are now.

2. **How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted student growth data?**
    - Challenges faced by some agencies when measuring learning loss include missing data due to suspended testing during the COVID-19 pandemic, low participation rates for assessments, and parent concerns about assessments.
    - States that have been affected by missing growth data are addressing it in different ways, including skipping one year of data, reporting the data with caveats, or reporting the data but excluding it from accountability.
3. **What types of programs or mitigation strategies are being planned or implemented to address learning loss?**
    - Solutions to addressing learning loss include having staff members review curricula to redefine what is necessary and important, offering tutoring, offering summer start programs for kindergarten, and partnering with community organizations to offer expanded learning options.
    - Summer school and the continuation and expansion of virtual learning have been popular options. NESAC members pointed out that in some states, students may only opt for virtual education if enrolled in a virtual school, as regular schools are not allowed to offer a virtual option. Other states are further developing their virtual education offerings to satisfy demand and to maintain enrollment levels.
    - States are using Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding (ESSER) in different ways, including hiring teachers for extra work, purchasing instructional supports, paying for summer school, engaging intervention specialists, and reducing class size.
    - NESAC members noted the importance of tailoring strategies to meet individual students' needs.

Post-Pandemic Data Needs Discussion

Cheryl L. VanNoy invited members to discuss questions related to how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted assessment participation rates and data uses, how agencies are planning to address gaps in assessment data, and how agencies are collecting data on instructional modality. Members shared the following responses:

1. **How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted assessment participation rates and data uses in your state or district?**
    - While some NESAC members reported declines in participation rates, others noted that in areas where schools remained in-person, participation rates were similar to previous years.
    - Agencies took new and different approaches to help encourage participation, including opening new testing windows, offering remote assessments, and bringing remote students back to schools for testing.
    - Agencies that allowed both remote and in-person testing can now compare data from these two approaches.
2. **How is your agency planning to address "missing" assessment data, especially the impact on longitudinal analyses?**

- Some agencies are highlighting assessment participation rates in public reporting so that it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the data.
- Other agencies are developing communications plans that explain the limitations of assessment data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic and caution careful use of the data.
- In addition to developing communication plans, agencies are considering how best to report missing data in a way that discourages inappropriate comparisons. For example, by presenting data from the 2020-21 school year separately from other data.
- One SEA that tracks student growth rates is implementing a skip year model in which they will exclude the 2020-21 school year from the analysis.

3. **How is your agency collecting data on instructional modality?**
    - NESAC members reported many different approaches to collecting data on whether school was offered in-person, virtually, or in a hybrid model. Approaches included conducting collections daily, weekly, quarterly, at the beginning of the semester, and at the end of the year.
    - Some LEAs tracked modality data at the student level to show when a student was virtual due to quarantine.
    - While some SEAs collected modality data from LEAs, others did not.
    - Hawaii included modality in the student information system for schools to enter. The data were reported quarterly: https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/ConnectWithUs/MediaRoom/PressReleases/Pages/Return-to-Learn---Metrics.aspx.
    - NESAC members noted that agencies' ability to offer virtual learning will be useful after the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, it may be a way to offer students access to specialized courses that are not offered in their school.

Wednesday, July 14, 2021

Joint Session Follow-up: Virtual Education and Attendance

Cheryl L. VanNoy opened the day's NESAC session by revisiting the previous joint session's topic of virtual education and attendance. NESAC members were asked to consider and respond to the following questions:

- What did you learn during the presentation?
- What challenges and solutions can NESAC members share from their agencies?
- What did you learn from your own experience?

Key takeaways included the following:

- The more agency staff can communicate with each other, the better—and these communications should be in writing so that they can be disseminated to a wide audience without being misinterpreted. One agency's response has been to give certain agency roles their own specific communications team to handle the increased communications need. As a result, email contacts have increased.
- Agencies should be aware of the hazard of sending out communications too early, and then having to send out corrections or clarifications after the fact in the face of changes, or due to haste. Urgency should not overpower consideration.

- NESAC members stressed the importance of communication protocols; better for messaging to reach people effectively than to blanket them with emails.
- Data governance is critical. Lessons learned about data governance, especially as it relates to managing virtual education and attendance data, will help agencies pivot more quickly between virtual, in-person, and hybrid models in the future. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many established policies, practices, and guidelines did not fit the day-to-day situations.
- Different state approaches to managing attendance data included
    - establishing requirements for a set number of communications per week between teacher and virtual student, as a means of verifying the connection;
    - disseminating SEA-produced guidance documents for attendance;
    - checking current enrollment against the numbers and IDs from the previous year to identify missing students;
    - disseminating frequently asked questions through multiple channels; and
    - using translators and social workers to ensure communication with all families.
- NESAC members noted the importance of adapting policies to ensure that they meet the needs of students. For example, some families remained out of the country due to COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions and it was necessary to modify policies that required students to be in the district so that the affected students could access virtual learning.
- An ongoing challenge for SEAs and LEAs in a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic is determining the balance between the need for SEA guidance and the need to minimize LEA reporting burdens while still collecting quality data.

Remote Learning Discussion

Online Learning Consortium (OLC) 2021 Report

Peggy Jones (Pasco County Schools, Florida) attended the OLC 2021 virtual conference on behalf of the Forum. She reported that there were two key themes to the sessions she attended: online learning and equity. Peggy reported that while many of the presentations were focused on postsecondary online learning, the information and discussion were relevant to Forum members. Topics of interest included the following:

- Presenters shared research drawn from the experiences of long-time online instructors. Key findings were that they were skilled in communication, organization, time management, and technology skills. Online instructors cited the ability to make an impact and the flexibility of working online as some of the reasons they continued online teaching.
- Presenters discussed strategic online facilitation strategies for teachers, including the importance of the instructor's presence, ongoing communication, and the use of different communication methods.
- The Peralta Equity Rubric (https://web.peralta.edu/de/equity-initiative/equity/) is a research-based course (re)design evaluation instrument to help teachers make online course experiences more equitable for all students.

Ongoing Uses of Remote Learning Discussion

Cheryl L. VanNoy invited members to continue the discussion around remote learning by discussing challenges and best practices. The discussion focused on three related topics: whether

agencies are planning to use some form of remote learning during the upcoming school year, whether agencies are replacing inclement weather days with remote learning, and whether the demand for virtual education will continue into the future. Members shared the following responses:

1. **Is your agency planning to use some form of remote learning during the upcoming school year?**
    - Several agencies reported that the expectation is that schools will have the capacity to offer in-person learning for all students, but that they are still offering options for remote learning.
    - In some cases, agencies are required to offer remote options, while in other cases it is optional.
    - Depending on how funding is allocated to LEAs, some agencies may lose funding if students choose remote instead of in-person instruction.
    - In some states, final decisions about the status of remote learning during the upcoming school year are dependent on current legislation.
2. **Some agencies are planning to replace inclement weather days with online learning days, while others are creating new virtual programs or schools. How widespread are these changes?**
    - It is perhaps more accurate to talk of weather calamity days.
    - In several states, the expectation is that the superintendent determines when inclement weather days are shifted to remote learning days.
    - Some agencies reported that they have historically offered alternate means of instruction for days when school buildings have been closed. These options were often expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in some cases are now being curtailed.
    - Other agencies reported that they are not considering offering remote options for inclement weather days.
    - In agencies that switch to online learning due to weather, there is an expectation that students and teachers must take their devices home every day.
    - Online learning due to weather raises questions of equity. If agencies require online learning, students who do not have access to high-speed internet are at a disadvantage.
    - Agencies are continuing to address the issue of inadequate internet connectivity. While the deployment of hot spots and other measures have helped, there is still inequity. For example, some areas experience internet "dead zones" due to geography. NESAC members noted that community outreach is key to improving internet access.
    - Nevada developed a public-private initiative to help ensure internet connectivity for all students: https://connectingkidsnv.org/.
    - One challenge with offering remote learning due to weather events is that some teachers still need to go into their classrooms to access the materials they need to teach.
    - The switch to online learning causes data reporting challenges because it is difficult to translate time spent online to traditional measures of "seat time" in instructional minutes.

3. **Do you think the demand for virtual education will continue after the COVID-19 pandemic?**
    - Several NESAC members noted that their agencies are still using virtual education due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
    - In the future, virtual education may be a useful way to offer students access to courses that may not be offered at their schools. It may also be used more frequently as a delivery method for instruction that is blended into the regular school day.
    - Virtual education may also be used more frequently as the costs of operating schools continue to increase.
    - It will be important to solve issues related to equity and access when considering future uses of virtual education.
    - It will also be important to address the question of scale, and whether virtual education is coordinated at the LEA level, via LEA collaboration, or at the state level. As an example of a statewide approach, the Vermont Agency of Education partnered with the Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative to provide statewide virtual learning: https://education.vermont.gov/press-release/agency-of-education-partners-with-vtvlc-continuity-of-learning.

NESAC Election

Gunes Kaplan was nominated as the 2021-22 NESAC chair and Laura Hansen (Metro Nashville Public Schools, Tennessee) was nominated as the 2021-22 NESAC vice chair.

Thursday, July 15, 2021

Data Reporting Discussion

Data Reporting and Data Sharing

Wendy Geller (Vermont Agency of Education) launched a discussion with financial reporting questions, including: how do NESAC members provide financial information and carry out financial reporting, how do agencies explain financial policies (such as per-pupil expenditures [PPE]) to stakeholders in the community; and are there best practices for departmental fiscal training? NESAC members suggested making versions of financial reports available online both for internal staff and the public. These reports may be as simple as Excel spreadsheets, or as complex as interactive visualizations. Examples include the following:

- The Nevada Department of Education offers interactive visualizations for each school's PPE data, such as this visualization for an elementary school: http://nevadareportcard.nv.gov/DI/nv/washoe/george_westergard_elementary_school/2020/finance.
- Michigan's portal provides online courses, slide decks, conference presentations, and other training tools: https://mischooldata.org.
- The Iowa Department of Education's Student Reporting and Finance teams had several meetings to develop an accountability and coding matrix: https://educateiowa.gov/documents/school-level-reporting/2021/04/accountability-and-coding-matrix-excel.
- The Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's financial reports: https://datacenter.ride.ri.gov/Finance/AllReports.

- Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, Alaska has a data dashboard that provides transparent flexible access to data for the public: https://public.tableau.com/profile/k12northstar#!/.
- The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction provides financial reporting related to the COVID-19 pandemic: https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/district-operations/financial-and-business-services/covid-funds.

One LEA benefits from its SEA's manner of pursuing grants, and its supply of reports to cross-check against specific districts. A different SEA trains school boards in financial reporting, and travels to schools in person to teach and explain.

Cheryl turned the conversation to ways of communicating and sharing these data across departments, and how agencies are currently handled this. Solutions offered ranged from the use of websites, software, and apps (both purchased and built in-house) to rules requiring account standardization and the employment of business managers throughout a state or district. Wendy closed the financial discussion with the point that while new financial software costs money, training and heightened awareness do not.

Highly-Mobile Student Data

Cheryl L. VanNoy proposed several questions on the subject of highly-mobile student data, including the following:

- How are data collected?
- Is there consistency across definitions?
- Are there better ways of collecting these data?

NESAC members shared their own experiences:

- Arizona encounters challenges in tracking data on American Indian students who move back and forth between public schools and tribal schools; the state is working in conjunction with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to resolve this.
- In Connecticut, students are unregistered at the end of each year and re-registered at the start of the next in the state enrollment system which helps ensure accurate mobility data.
- Some agencies such as Colorado collect three rates related to mobility: a stability rate that indicates the student stayed in one school the entire year, a student mobility rate that provides an unduplicated count of the number of students who moved, and a mobility incidence that records the number of moves.
- Michigan has a report on the MI School Data portal (https://mischooldata.org/) for student mobility. Here is a sample from one of the public school academies/charters: https://bit.ly/3knwPbc. The Student Mobility report shows how the student population changes within a given school year by comparing the number of students who left the district (mobile students), transferred into the district (incoming students), or remained in the district (stable students) after fall count day.
- In Nevada, mobility calculation is defined in the state law:
  "In determining the mobility of pupils in a school, for any purpose, the Department shall divide the sum of the following numbers by the cumulative enrollment in the school:
  (a) the number of late entries or transfers into a school from another school, school district or state, after the beginning of the school year;
  (b) the number of pupils reentering the school after having withdrawn from the same school; and

(c) the number of pupils who withdraw for any reason or who are dropped for nonattendance." (https://www.leg.state.nv.us/nrs/nrs-392.html)

- The passage of time is a factor in data accuracy because data may change over time. For example, an LEA's dropout numbers may be reduced when an agency receives updated information that a student has enrolled in another LEA.
- Agencies need different solutions to assist chronically mobile students as opposed to those displaced by a disaster.

Program Evaluation Discussion

Cheryl L. VanNoy facilitated a discussion around program evaluation in SEAs and LEAs. Discussion focused on the following topics:

- Some agencies have found that it is useful to have external researchers conduct program evaluations, while others find it is more effective to use agency staff.
- Benefits of using internal agency staff include the fact that they may already understand how data systems work as well as constraints on appropriate uses of data. Benefits of using external researchers include that they may be perceived as less biased toward programs. Some agencies have found a partnership model, in which the education agency and the external researchers work together, is most effective.
- NESAC members highlighted the importance of planning for evaluation at the outset of program design and implementation. Considerations include what types of data are needed for the evaluation and how those data can be collected effectively. Often, LEAs must pull data from handwritten notes or rosters; by planning for evaluation at the beginning, these data can be more effectively collected.
- It is also important to budget funding to cover program evaluation. Cost is not just financial; agencies need to invest in staff time to work with data for the evaluation, as well as ensuring that staff have the expertise needed to run analyses.
- Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) can assist SEAs and LEAs with program evaluations.
- The Forum has published SEA and LEA versions of the *Forum Guide to Data Access for Researchers* (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2012809.asp and https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2014801.asp). These guides are intended to help SEAs and LEAs determine whether and how to voluntarily fulfill requests from researchers for access to new and existing education data, including confidential or otherwise restricted data.

NESAC Committee Business

Cheryl recognized retiring NESAC members for their many contributions to the committee. She then thanked members for their participation in the meeting.