Policies, Programs, and Implementation Committee (PPI) Meeting Summary

Monday, August 7, 2023
Morning Session

PPI Committee Kickoff
PPI Chair Stephen Gervais, San Bernardino City Unified School District (CA), and PPI Vice Chair Jon Wiens, Oregon Department of Education, welcomed members to the meeting and led the group in introductions. Stephen briefly reviewed major activities and discussions from the 2022 PPI virtual meeting and reviewed the 2023 meeting agenda.

Opening Session Follow-up: Forum Working Groups
Members shared their feedback and takeaways following the Forum Working Groups Panel presentation by Jon, Cheryl L. VanNoy, Saint Louis Public Schools (MO), and Allen Miedema, Northshore School District (WA). Practitioner-focused resources, such as those developed by the Forum and the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Program, can help state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) use data and information to act.

Technology for Teaching and Learning: Agencies continue to consider evolving student and teacher needs for technology in given subjects when choosing apps and negotiating privacy agreements.

Student Learning Data During Pandemic School Closures and Beyond: Agencies need to define baselines for recovery, as well as how learning loss is measured. Much depends on the structure of assessments. Attendance and enrollment in the wake of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic remain a struggle.

Data Literacy: Agencies are working to use data in the most effective ways possible. This includes supporting SEA and LEA staff so that they have the requisite skills to understand data and minimize misinformation and misinterpretation. The example used in the presentation was useful: showing stakeholders both growth and gaps can increase understanding of data.

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Joint Session Followup: Cybersecurity
Stephen and Jon facilitated a discussion following the cybersecurity presentation by Steven Hernandez, U.S. Department of Education (ED). Members appreciated Steven's aim to prepare members to counter cybersecurity threats and shared the following key takeaways that they will bring back to their agencies:

- Some IT department responsibilities are not visible to other agency staff. From a staff perspective, the focus is on phishing attacks rather than overall system vulnerability.
- More clarity is needed on the necessary security knowledge for staff in various roles. Who should be included in tabletop exercises, and when?

- Security tests can be a wake-up call, but this information does not always reach the leadership level.
- The use of personal devices is a continuing security concern in many agencies, and there is no clear solution. Increased issues are expected with digitally based college admissions exams.

Data Privacy Discussion

Stephen and Jon facilitated a discussion about data privacy.

- Agencies must consider privacy concerns related to information shared with stakeholders, such as that disseminated via data dashboards.
- Privacy issues are complicated and need to be reviewed in multiple areas. Who is the audience? Who will have access? Will access be partitioned? Agencies want stakeholders to have access to data but need to ensure data goes to appropriate individuals.
- SEAs and LEAs suppress some data—suppression rules vary by location and type of data. What is released to the public has certain rules.
- Transparency about data collection and use is a crucial part of building trust from stakeholders; however, transparency must be balanced with a strong focus on data privacy. Education agencies must walk a careful line between the two.
- Clear and specific data sharing policies benefit agencies and research partners.

Educator Workforce Data Discussion

Stephen and Jon facilitated a discussion about educator workforce data.

- Most members have teacher and classified staff vacancies in their state or district.
- Data on teacher absences can be challenging—for example, determining whether teachers are sick or are in training.
- Agencies struggle to collect accurate data on vacancy rates. True rates are unknown from day to day, week, or month. SEAs do not always have access to timely data for LEAs, making it more difficult to provide support.
- Teacher mobility datasets should include teachers who are on leave. Any reason teachers are out of the classroom impacts learning, so they should be included in mobility data.
- Some states only have anecdotal data. Others have a wealth of data but struggle to align it in ways that can answer key questions.
- Many agencies are trying alternative staffing solutions such as hiring teachers from other countries or allowing provisional licenses.
- Agencies are working to improve methods for collecting workforce data. Some have struggled to map certifications to course placements or align licensure to School Courses for the Exchange of Data (SCED) codes.

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SCED Finder

Susan Williams, Virginia Department of Education, delivered a presentation on SCED, with a focus on the SCED Finder tool. SCED is a voluntary, common classification system for school courses from preschool to high school. Susan reviewed the elements that make up the 12-character SCED Identifier, discussed how the Forum maintains and updates SCED, and provided an overview of SCED resources. The Forum's SCED Working Group releases a new version each year and recently moved up the timeline for releases to better align with SEA and LEA needs. Each new SCED release is included in the Common Education Data Standards (CEDS).

She then navigated to https://nces.ed.gov/scedfinder and demonstrated how SEAs and LEAs can use the SCED Finder, an interactive online tool designed to help users search and browse SCED codes, assign elements to course codes, and save course lists. Other SCED resources include

- a downloadable, sortable file of current SCED codes, as well as files with previous versions;
- the SCED Master List, which is a downloadable file of every SCED code published in every version;
- an FAQ document;
- case studies that highlight effective SCED uses; and
- a training suite with guides and videos.

All SCED resources are available on the Forum's SCED webpage at https://nces.ed.gov/forum/sced.asp. In addition to helping staff who are responsible for course coding to understand SCED, these resources are useful for helping to explain the benefits of SCED to agency leaders.

Members discussed how SCED is customizable to SEA and LEA needs. While some SEAs that use SCED use the complete 12-character SCED Identifier, others use only the 5-digit SCED code. SCED aims to reflect courses that are offered currently in SEAs and LEAs, and Susan encouraged members to send recommendations for new or updated courses to the working group. Agencies do not need to use the latest SCED release if an earlier version meets the agency's needs. Susan provided an example of how SCED benefits state reporting by sharing Virginia's use of SCED to create reports on teacher supply and demand. More information is available at https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/teaching-in-virginia/education-workforce-data-reports.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Education

Stephen and Jon facilitated a discussion about AI and education.

- A key question is how to use AI knowingly—that is, not to plagiarize but to support education.
- Homework often has been used as a proxy for evidence of learning. If AI can be used by students to write papers, what is the new measure of learning?
- The current landscape for AI is akin to the invention of the printing press, airplanes, or personal computers, in that it will change everything.

- In some ways, the effective use of AI should be about the rules, control, and validation processes. How does one verify that the AI feedback is accurate and acceptable to the user?
- Schools cannot just block AI on their networks: This could become an equity barrier because the students who have the Internet at home still could use it.
- AI can be used positively; for example, it has been used to optimize bussing routes, which reduces costs and pollution and holds no negative concerns about the originality of the product.
- AI has expanded rapidly in the past 6 months. The Forum's conversations next year will be quite different.

Pandemic-Related Topics

Stephen and Jon facilitated a discussion about topics related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund[1] Reporting

- Agencies received funding and were encouraged to spend it, but then faced challenges when asked to collect data and evaluate effectiveness later on.
- Agencies used the funding for many purposes, including hiring substitutes, supporting mental health, staffing for accelerated instruction, and paying attendance officers.
- Mitigating learning loss requires additional, high-quality learning materials.
- Some temporary staffing soon will sunset with the loss of ongoing funding, so supports like accelerated instruction for learning loss now will fall heavily on regular instruction.

Financial Sustainability Post-COVID Emergency Funding

- Agencies knew the money would end, so some avoided permanent staff commitments. The scheduled ESSER cutoff discouraged new staff positions.
- Some locations have relied heavily on paying retired teachers to come back due to teacher shortages.
- Evaluations of program effectiveness were made public in some states, and the effective programs were sent to state legislatures with the goal of receiving new funding.
- Some agencies made amendments to plans because items were unavailable when supply chains were disrupted during the pandemic. For example, health care shortages meant that schools could not always get needed supplies. In some agencies, requests for proposal (RFPs) went out and received no response.
- Outcome data do not necessarily provide a complete picture. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores dropped, for example, but how much worse may scores have been without emergency funding for intervention support?
- Parents' expectations have changed permanently: They expect more educational choices for their children.

Digital Equity

[1] https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/elementary-secondary-school-emergency-relief-fund/

- Some agencies did not plan to keep devices provided during the pandemic, and soon students will no longer have them, leading to unequal access. Other states were able to invest in basic digital infrastructure, thus improving access even as school-provided devices no longer are provided to students.
- Some states took the opportunity to go online for all future assessments during COVID-19. Others are unable to use remote assessments due to security concerns.
- Some rural areas had broadband internet added during the pandemic, but now there are questions as to how these utilities will be maintained.
- Even in high-poverty communities, most students have smartphones. Schools are introducing apps that will work on phones because they recognize phones are used by students, teachers, and parents.
- Students who only have mobile cellular access do not log in as much as students who have tablets, which creates a huge digital divide in some communities.

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South by Southwest (SXSW) EDU Update

Will Goodman, Boise School District (ID), attended the SXSW EDU meeting on behalf of the Forum. SXSW EDU offers a wide range of sessions, in-depth workshops, learning experiences, mentorship, film screenings, future-focused competitions, an expo, networking opportunities, performances, and more. SXSW EDU attendees include educators, administrators, policymakers, students, entrepreneurs, industry leaders, and others. National education priorities at SXSW included:

- A push for data science courses
- Improving teacher education
- Approaching the ESSER fiscal cliff
- Developments in brain science
- Data literacy in education

Joint Session Followup: The Anatomy of a Hack

Stephen and Jon facilitated a discussion following the presentation by the Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC). Members shared the following key takeaways that they will bring back to their agencies:

- The concept of humans acting as the security firewall may sound good, but social engineering still is one of the most effective ways to hack into a system.
- USB flash drives are being banned in many school districts due to security concerns.
- PTAC is available to provide online or on-site technical assistance and presentations on privacy-related topics free of charge to requesting organizations. More information about requesting training and technical assistance is available at https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/request-ptac-training-or-technical-assistance.
- A few agencies offer privacy training as a component of onboarding and/or annual training at the beginning of the school year.
- In one state, the majority of LEAs have not received FERPA training.

- Members are concerned that the risks of AI may be outpacing agencies' abilities to protect student data privacy.

Demographic Data Challenges Discussion

Stephen and Jon facilitated a discussion about the challenges agencies face in collecting and using demographic data.

- Some LEAs changed to federal definitions only to find that their state had not.
- Proposed race and ethnicity changes may be helpful to reduce blanks in the data.
- No matter how well the data are defined, the system is only as good as the most poorly trained data input staff.
- Measures of population outcomes at the local level can sometimes be more effective than the Census Bureau's national definitions.
- Agencies do not expect changes in National School Lunch Program (NSLP) data rules anytime soon.
- The NCES Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE) (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Home) program uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey to create custom indicators of social, economic, and housing conditions for school-age children and their parents. It also uses spatial data collected by NCES and the Census Bureau to create geographic locale indicators, school point locations, school district boundaries, and other types of data to support spatial analysis.

Mobility Discussion

Stephen and Jon facilitated a discussion about mobility data.

- Many LEAs and SEAs across the country see a significant amount of mobility, as students move between schools or districts. Tracking data for these students can raise challenges, but strong standards and processes can help to maintain data quality.
- Members realized that their agencies define and operationalize these concepts differently even though the members think they understand this issue comparably.
- Agencies seek a national formula for calculating mobility to reduce the current variability in applying the data.
- If parents remove a student for safety concerns, they rarely notify the school to minimize the likelihood of being tracked. If a parent says the family is moving out of state or country, the school stops tracking.
- Many reasons for mobility are legitimate, such as following work or being evicted. These issues affect the ability of kids to stay at the same school.
- When data follow students to new districts, transitions are much better than when a student arrives without information and the receiving district struggles to help inform placement.
- PPI has an interest in developing a working group to develop a Forum resource on the mobility and stability of students and teachers.

PPI Election

Jon Wiens, Oregon Department of Education, was nominated as the 2023-24 PPI Chair and Peggy Jones, Pasco County Schools (FL), was nominated as the 2023-24 PPI Vice Chair.

Wednesday, August 9, 2023
Morning Session

Data Literacy Discussion
Stephen and Jon facilitated a discussion about data literacy.

- Data literacy can be summarized as the ability to explore, understand, and communicate with data in a meaningful way. The importance of data literacy has become increasingly prominent in recent data discussions.
- Not everyone needs to be a data scientist. Agencies should focus on role-based literacy and what specifically is needed for different groups.
- Data literacy is not limited to assessment—it is about responsible data use.
- Stakeholders are looking for coherence and are receptive to learning more about data. Most people want to know the right course of action based on the data.
- Members agreed that the Forum should continue to focus on providing data literacy resources.

Topics from the Floor
Stephen and Jon invited the group to discuss any topics of interest.

- With increasing student research occurring, students should be taught about data privacy, as well as ethics.
- PPI's focus on implementation should include planning, implementation, and evaluation: best practices for implementing programs with fidelity.
- A best practice guide for dashboard development.
- PPI should consider public versus private curation of data and the effects of each.
- Vendors tend to train on how to use the technology (product), not how to use the data.
- The IES What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) tries to inform people about vendor product effectiveness. Though the information is meant to be accessible to non-experts, some of it can be too advanced for practitioners to understand and use.

PPI Committee Business
Steering Committee Business/Report
Stephen 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
Stephen thanked members for their participation.

Members shared the following suggestions for future consideration:

- Citation of sources only will become more critical as AI becomes more prominent. Source information must be visible, transparent, understandable, and free; it cannot live only in an appendix or footnote.
- Some new Forum members are unaware of existing Forum or other federal resources. Members would like to have a way to see common definitions of frequently used terms and categories of data included in Forum resources such as the *Using Education Indicators: A Forum Guide for State and Local Education Agencies* (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2022132.asp), *Forum Guide to Exit Codes* (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2020132.asp), and the *Forum Guide to Data Visualization: A Resource for Education Agencies* (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2017016.asp).