

## NESAC Standing Committee Virtual Meeting Notes

2:30 - 4:00 pm (ET)  
Wednesday, June 24

Chair: Cheryl VanNoy, St. Louis Public Schools (MO)  
Vice Chair: Gunes Kaplan, Nevada Department of Education

### Data Management and the Pandemic

**Issue:** Many state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) are challenged by the current situation, given that education agency staff are not experts in pandemic data management and do not have prior experience with similar situations. Also, more pressing needs, such as providing students with food and technology support, have taken precedence over data-related matters.

**Discussion Questions:** How is your agency approaching data management and ensuring that essential data are collected during the pandemic? Has your agency prioritized certain data, and if so, for what purposes? What types of data has your agency found most useful for decisionmaking regarding continuity of operations?

- Members noted multiple challenges and solutions related to data management during the pandemic and identified the data their agencies were prioritizing.
  - Different stakeholders have different priorities. SEAs have data needs related to returning students to school, but these are often different than LEA data priorities. For example, an SEA may be focused on where students will be learning (virtually or in a school building) whereas LEAs may be more focused on how to support student learning regardless of location.
  - At this time, it is difficult to know what data management issues will arise due to the pandemic. For example, difficulties with tracking students during and after the pandemic could lead to higher dropout numbers in future years.
  - Post-pandemic, will there be enough information to identify the reason that there are lags or lapses in assessments since there will be gaps in the data?
  - Common challenges include confirming students' fall enrollment, school of intended attendance, and type of instruction selected. Ensuring the accuracy of contact information is also a challenge.
  - LEA representatives offered their perspectives:
    - They rely on assessment data, but did not run assessments this past spring.
    - They are continuing to collect some forms of data, but are also waiting for state definitions for the coming year to clarify some data collections, such as how attendance data will be managed and recorded.
    - They are focused on end of year data submissions for the state and preparation for state testing in the fall.

- SEA representatives noted that they are focused on attendance data for the fall, including resolving attendance data issues. Many important fiscal calculations require attendance data, such as full-time equivalency (FTE).
- Many SEAs and LEAs are conducting or are planning to conduct surveys to get crucial data on one or more of the following:
  - technology;
  - engagement;
  - parent/guardian and staff perspectives on returning to school in the fall;
  - meal information;
  - child care;
  - parent, staff, and student satisfaction with remote learning and perspectives on the non-traditional instruction experience; and
  - barriers to accessing online services, including the lack of broadband in remote areas.
- The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction worked with research partners at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee to develop technology surveys. They are available online at: <https://uwm.edu/sreed/distance-learning/>.
- It is difficult to ensure equity with regard to access to online surveys, and agencies may need to use alternative ways to get information, including using paper surveys and call out telephone system surveys to collect data.
- Some surveys have been organized hastily and poorly, and the results are therefore difficult to use. Surveys are also challenging when they are done via the Internet because some families do not have access.

### Data Quality

**Issue:** Given the lack of time, planning, and infrastructure necessary to effectively transition to remote learning and working, data that are currently being collected may have quality issues and poor data quality could compromise the future use of data.

**Discussion Questions:** What strategies can help agencies ensure that data quality is maintained during the pandemic? How has remote work impacted your agency's data processes? What types of metadata might be useful for identifying data that are collected during the pandemic? For example, some agencies are using asterisks next to grades given during the pandemic.

- LEA members shared the following strategies they are using or recommending to ensure that data quality is maintained during the pandemic:
  - Ensure the business rules for operations are clearly stated and communicated throughout the organization. Create a support system to provide staff with assistance and/or information on data collection issues or other data issues. Ensure that various departments meet to collaboratively create understanding on data topics such as special education, attendance, enrollment, English learners, and curriculum. Be honest about data quality issues. Do not hide what happened or what occurred. For example, the dropout rate is low this year

because agencies could not properly identify those who might have truly dropped out.

- Be clear about the purpose of data and any constraints on the data or quality issues. For example, pandemic attendance data are different than regular attendance data.
  - Business rules are integrated with policy and regulations; agencies should document the changes and impact.
  - Consider current data collections a “best effort” with regard to data integrity and accuracy. These data should not be used to make decisions or measure accountability or growth.
  - Compare typically reported data with historic data. Data gathered informally during the pandemic (such as a new code to track student/teacher engagement) may not be comparable to pre-pandemic data, such as attendance data, and should be used with caution.
  - Make sure that the data stewards and the department responsible for collecting the data are known. For example, when working remotely, Food Service Directors did not always know who to talk to for data quality or reports needed within their districts.
  - Consider all data as formative.
- SEA members shared the following strategies they are using or recommending to ensure that data quality is maintained during the pandemic:
    - Be clear about what data are of good quality and/or are comparable to pre-pandemic data.
    - Document and store metadata about data currently being collected. Next year, everyone will remember that there are constraints on this year’s data. However, ten years from now, they may not remember and will rely on metadata.
    - Add extra validations.
  - LEA members noted ways that remote work is impacting themselves and their agencies:
    - Some agencies do not have the technology for staff to have video cameras, or they prohibit their use, so it is not possible to view individuals remotely.
    - The effects of remote work depend on the department, person, and position. For example, some information technology (IT) departments are working more, while some hourly employees in other departments needed to have new duties assigned. Some staff are working longer hours from home. Previously they would end the day at 5pm, but many now work until 7 or 8 pm. While not all teachers adapted to the online environment, others thrived.
    - Hiring and onboarding new staff remotely is challenging, especially key staff and leaders who have never met their teams face-to-face. However, this is what LEAs need to do.

- Many staff are not taking sick and vacation time. Those that are taking vacation are often still showing up for virtual meetings. Burnout is a concern.
- As LEA staff transition back to the office, some staff with underlying health conditions are taking sick time because they are not comfortable being around others in the office. Those who are coming into the office see each other less since they tend to have doors closed and due to social distancing they have staggered onsite and remote work.
- Engaging school staff outside of the school environment can be difficult, but many staff members are embracing engagement via collaborative software and have learned how to offer support remotely using screen sharing. In addition, some operations have been more efficient when done via online collaborative tools.
- Some data systems were not accessible from home.
- LEAs need to expand access to virtual private networks (VPNs).
- Working from home with small children necessitates responding to issues late at night as well as doing work off-and-on during the day.
- SEA members noted ways that remote work is impacting themselves and their agencies:
  - In one SEA, a hiring freeze during the pandemic has resulted in staff operating as a skeleton crew. Staff are more efficient but are struggling with capacity issues. Ongoing uncertainty is also affecting staff. Burnout is a concern, and staff are not taking time off.
  - While some SEAs found that virtual meetings have made coordination and collaboration more difficult, others have found that communication is better using collaborative tools than in the office.
  - Video/call quality can be poor over remote connections.
  - Efficient staff have been able to accomplish even more work in the last three months working from home, while other staff are less effective at home. Some staff do not have enough work to do. Burnout is a concern.
  - Working from home has been difficult for staff in SEA departments who have been furloughed one day a week and not all on the same day. They have been professional and are trying to get everything done in a shortened time frame. Everyone is pulling together, but this has led to issues with collaboration.

## Attendance Data

**Issue:** Defining, collecting, and using attendance data has been challenging during extended school closures.

**Discussion Questions:** How is “attendance” defined during extended school closures? For example, how would attendance data be recorded if take-home instructional packets are provided to students?

- Members expressed concerns with tracking attendance not only for the end of the last school year, but also for the fall when schools may offer ongoing virtual options or allow students into school buildings only part-time. How will these different

attendance scenarios be defined and captured in student information systems (SISs) and what are the implications for attendance data over time?

- Some agencies are considering mastery versus seat time for attendance measures. However, members cautioned that students are not always engaged when they are in the classroom and they are still counted as “present.” Changing to mastery versus seat time would result in more stringent requirements for virtual versus in-person attendance. Not every student in attendance is learning, so completed work should not be used as a proxy for attendance.
- K-12 education may be impacted by the fact that families will have more choice options as alternative education models are offered.
- LEA members shared their agencies’ approaches to tracking attendance during the pandemic:
  - counting students as present since closing school buildings unless their parent/guardian contacted the LEA and explicitly told staff that the student was absent (this simple definition allowed for easy data collection);
  - counting all students as present if instruction was provided;
  - keeping local data on engagement in addition to required data on attendance;
  - tracking participation/interaction over traditional attendance;
  - counting students as “present” provided they checked in;
  - broadening the definition of a check-in to accommodate students (check-ins may include telephone calls, online meeting attendance, or turning in work), or adjusting the number of required check-ins;
  - tasking educational staff with specific responsibility for student contacts and check-ins;
  - developing a new attendance code for students who do not engage, and keeping this separate from the usual absence code;
  - creating a new “blended learning” code for when a student was engaging with remote learning (business rules for this new code have not, in all cases, been finalized);
  - looking at virtual schools’ approach to attendance, including models for assessing student engagement with the learning content; and
  - creating more granular codes to indicate why a student is staying home (mandated quarantine, risk avoidance, remote learning preference, etc.).
- A key piece for LEAs is to find out what SEAs will count as “present” for the purposes of calculating average daily membership (ADM) and for funding. LEAs whose models are based on membership rather than attendance reported fewer concerns with funding.

- SEA members reported similar approaches to LEAs, including the following:
  - Suspending attendance counts once school buildings closed. This had both benefits and costs. It allowed traditional attendance to be foregone, but LEAs still needed a way to find out if students were engaged.
  - Releasing new attendance codes such as a “blended learning” code or a COVID-19 attendance code.
  - Assigning teachers, office staff, and others to reach out to non-responsive students on a set schedule, such as once or more each week.
  - Establishing working groups to develop new attendance measures, guidance regarding outreach to students, and example protocols for focusing more on performance and engagement indicators. Particular attention is being given to calculating a comparable attendance measure to data collected during face-to-face schooling. Even if a student comes to school and sleeps in class, he or she is counted as present, and this is recorded separately from academic performance. It is important to avoid blending definitions of “present” with “engagement” because this could lead to incorrect membership counts and affect funding.

### **Student Registration Information**

**Issue:** The pandemic has highlighted the need to collect and maintain more comprehensive student registration information.

**Discussion Topic:** Which types of data that are not currently collected would be helpful to capture upon registration and regularly update (e.g. e-mail address, cell phone number, home internet access)?

- Members noted an increased need for the following types of data:
  - accurate and complete contact information (some families provided incomplete information, for example, not indicating their full e-mail address);
  - updated addresses for the purposes of Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) cards (the P-EBT system needs mailing addresses, but in some cases school only had residence addresses, making it difficult to find the families to provide them with cards);
  - number of people using one device in the same household;
  - number of students who have left the LEA;
  - immunization records;
  - device ownership and number of devices per student; and
  - students who have moved out of the district, but continue to attend their school of origin remotely (this is an issue when students move to a new LEA that is not permitting new registrations. In this case, students may be allowed to remain enrolled in their former LEA and take part in virtual learning even if they have moved to a new district).
- To collect needed data, agencies have added questions during registration about access and devices. Some agencies are asking families to update their registration and

contact information more frequently, and others are offering expanded registration options, including online registration and curbside registration. Some agencies are introducing online registration for older students, but continuing in-person registration (with social distancing) for younger students.

- Online registration causes challenges for LEAs. For example, storing and indexing pictures or scans of paper records like birth certificates, proof of residence, and immunizations in the SIS is a new process for some LEAs that creates a technical challenge. Online registration is very difficult for families whose only devices are cell phones.
- Members discussed strategies for providing technology access, including the following:
  - Providing hotspots and other devices to students (and sometimes staff) who qualify—some LEAs noted that while they have funds to offer devices, they also need to provide internet service and support, and it can be difficult to ensure that students who have multiple home addresses have adequate internet availability. Other LEAs have areas where hotspots are not an option due to lack of connectivity.
  - Activating hotspots at school buildings or vans parked around the district—parents were invited to drive children to those locations and use the hotspots to do schoolwork. This was helpful in rural divisions, and their parking lots were full of cars with kids doing school work.
  - Using telecommunications software optimized for remote work—this would enable staff to answer their desk phones from their computer or forward their office lines to their cell phones.
  - Allowing families to make additional technology requests to LEAs when their circumstances change—some parents initially answered surveys saying that they did not need a computer for student learning, but when their businesses closed the parents needed to use the home computer, too.
  - Taking advantage of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act—members are using CARES Act funds to help with technology needs, including purchasing laptops and hotspots for all students that need them and purchasing phones for remote staff. Others are considering potential CARES Act fund uses.

### **Post-Pandemic Data Needs**

**Issue:** There may be a need for information and support regarding data that will be needed once the pandemic is over.

**Discussion Topic:** What types of data will be needed after the pandemic?

- Members identified the following types of data that will be needed after the pandemic:
  - method of instruction;
  - student-based learning method (these data need to be linked to the student now, and not to the course);
  - stress or trauma data (this can impact engagement and student behavior);
  - equity data (equity issues must be researched and validated);

- staff stress data (stress and trauma may also affect teachers—many teachers are also parents, and assisting children while teaching students is stressful);
- attendance data (if schools are remote again in the fall, will attendance be collected using current methods?);
- device losses during remote learning;
- social-emotional learning (SEL) data;
- data that can be used to evaluate the delivery of instruction by platform, possibly using fall assessment data as a measure; and
- updated enrollment data (LEAs may not know who left the LEA).
- When SEAs determine what data they want, LEAs may struggle if the format or details change dramatically from what they have collected.
- After the pandemic there will likely be more remote learning than in the past. This could help future students who need at-home instruction due to long-term illnesses. It could also help to improve access to courses. For example, while an LEA may not be able to offer in-person Latin instruction in all high schools, in the future this course could be offered across an LEA via remote instruction. Instructional methods (blended, in-person, and online) will need to be tracked.
- This pandemic took everyone by surprise. However, if another pandemic occurs, the public will expect education agencies to be prepared. Agencies need to make sure they are capturing the data needed during and after a pandemic.

### Other Issues

Other pandemic-related data issues identified by members included the following:

- Members cautioned that data privacy cannot be compromised during remote learning.
  - Some teachers were taking pictures of their online class activities and posting the pictures on social media.
  - It is important to regularly remind staff that e-mail is not a secure method for sharing personal information.
  - Staff should have access to a VPN when working from home.
  - It is important to not expand permissions or the allotment of allowable entrances into the network. Security must be maintained.
- How can agencies monitor plagiarism? Some vendors have protocols to ensure that students are completing their own work. Higher education has developed secure assessment platforms; K-12 will need to develop this ability as well.
- Transportation and classroom capacity will be impacted by social distancing. How can agencies support and fund more bus routes, teachers, and classrooms? Some bus drivers will not be able to drive because of medical risks.
- One LEA is looking at offering both wellness clinics and possible coronavirus clinics in schools. This will require additional medical data tracking, and the LEA may need to add more codes in the SIS.
- Survey data from an SEA indicated a need for professional development for both teachers and parents.
- Potential data issues include:

- issues with future dropout data;
- a missing year of student assessment data in student growth or value added reports;
- learning loss;
- reporting gap year data on SEA/LEA report cards;
- issues with the accuracy of discipline data;
- post-high school data, including 2- and 4-year plans; and
- Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) data burden on LEAs during the pandemic.
- Universities are planning different fall schedules, including starting early and ending the fall semester at Thanksgiving. Others will start face-to-face, then switch to online learning at Thanksgiving.
- Models forecasting the “COVID slide” have been developed at the LEA level, but only with the use of 4 years of historic data. For reasons of time, SEL impacts have not yet been factored in. These models will help educators have an idea of what to expect from students in the fall. Next year’s teachers will need to learn how to teach instructional content that was missed last year.
- Ghedam invited members to e-mail other topics for consideration to the team.