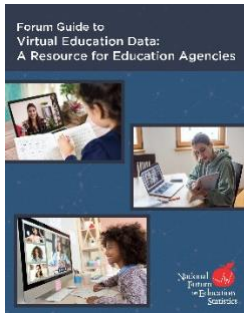# Forum Guide to Virtual Education Data: A Resource for Education Agencies

In spring 2020, nearly all school districts across the nation transitioned to virtual education during extended school closures caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. K-12 education agencies pivoted to virtual education in a short amount of time with limited options available for developing a virtual education program. The swift and widespread adoption of virtual education underscored the need for agencies to address persistent complications, such as the impact of different education delivery models on data collections, as well as emerging challenges, such as equitable access to virtual education technology.

The National Forum on Education Statistics (Forum) developed the *Forum Guide to Virtual Education Data: A Resource for Education Agencies* to assist agencies with collecting data in virtual education settings, incorporating the data into governance processes and policies, and using the data to improve virtual education offerings. This resource builds upon the 2016 resource *Forum Guide to Elementary/Secondary Virtual Education Data* (https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/NFES2016095.pdf), reflects lessons learned by the education data community during the COVID-19 pandemic, and provides recommendations that will help agencies collect and use virtual education data. The primary audience for this publication includes federal, state, and local education agencies, as well as various education stakeholders including, but not limited to, policymakers, researchers, data management and technology professionals, program coordinators, district and school staff, and the parents of school-age children interested or involved in virtual education.

The resource includes the following chapters and appendices:

- **Chapter 1: Virtual Education** provides an overview of virtual education by examining common terminology and organizational structures, discussing the importance of high-quality data collection, and highlighting potential policy implications.
- **Chapter 2: Virtual Education Data: Opportunities, Challenges, and Best Practices in States and Districts** identifies opportunities available through virtual education data; delineates challenges to collecting virtual education data; and supplies best practices for collecting, managing, and using virtual education data.
- **Chapter 3: Virtual Education Data Elements** identifies data elements commonly used in virtual education data systems.
- **Chapter 4: Virtual Education Data Use Policy Questions and Common Practices** introduces key topic areas and examples, policy questions, and common practices designed to aid state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) as they collect data elements and deploy systems to deliver virtual education.
- **Appendix A** includes examples of SEA and LEA policies.
- **Appendix B** provides a list of SEA virtual and distance learning websites.

The *Forum Guide to Virtual Education Data: A Resource for Education Agencies* is a product of the National Forum on Education Statistics and is available on the Forum website at https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2021078.asp. The information and opinions published in the guide are the product of the Forum and do not necessarily represent the policies or views of the U.S. Department of Education, the Institute of Education Sciences, or the National Center for Education Statistics.

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