**Traveling Through Time:
The Forum Guide to
Longitudinal Data Systems,
Book One: What is an LDS?**
http://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2010805.asp

By facilitating the collection and use of detailed, high quality student- and staff- level data linked over time, longitudinal data systems (LDSs) hold promise for enhancing both the way education agencies use data to serve students and the way they do business, from the policy level to the school office and into the classroom. The *Traveling Through Time: The Forum Guide to Longitudinal Data Systems* series is intended to help state and local education agencies meet the many challenges involved in building robust LDSs, populating them with quality data, and using this new information to improve the education system. With special emphasis on the business-level perspective, this document explores a broad range of issues involved in establishing a successful LDS.

Book One of Four: What is an LDS? is a primer on LDSs, which focuses on the fundamental questions of what an LDS is, what steps should be taken to achieve a sound system, what components make up an ideal system, and why such a system is of value in education. This first book in the guide series focuses on the fundamental questions of what an LDS is (and what it is not), what steps should be taken to achieve a sound system, what components make up an ideal system, and why such a system is of value in education.

Chapter 1 introduces this guide series, discussing its purpose, format, and intended audience. Chapter 2 covers some LDS basics, defining the concept of a "longitudinal data system" and laying out key nontechnical steps to planning and developing a successful system. Chapter 3 presents the technical components that generally comprise an LDS, as well as some additional features that may enhance the system. Chapter 4 addresses some common misconceptions regarding longitudinal data systems. Chapter 5 discusses the overarching benefits of an LDS. Subsequent books in the series will address LDS planning and development, and the effective management and use of longitudinal data.

The *Traveling Through Time: The Forum Guide to Longitudinal Data Systems* series is a product of the National Forum on Education Statistics. The first book in the series was released in July 2010, with the three subsequent books to be released in sequence through the remainder of 2010. The project is sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education, under the auspices of the National Cooperative Education Statistics System. For more information about the National Forum on Education Statistics, visit http://nces.ed.gov/forum.