Forum Guide to Metadata

Education agencies rely on data for decision-making, but the volume and complexity of information collected can make it difficult to manage and use data effectively. Education staff and other data users frequently need information about an agency's data, such as where the data are stored, when they were collected, the source of the data, and the data's verification status. This information, known as metadata, provides vital context for understanding and interpreting data.

The National Forum on Education Statistics (Forum) developed the *Forum Guide to Metadata* for education agency staff members who use metadata in the course of their work, including teachers, data stewards, and data managers. The guide also may be of use to other data users such as researchers who benefit from a more thorough understanding of an agency's metadata. The *Forum Guide to Metadata* includes case studies and appendices presenting the metadata experiences of state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) around the country, as well as a glossary of common metadata items for easy reference.

The resource includes the following chapters and appendices:

- **Chapter 1: Metadata and Metadata Systems** introduces the concept of metadata, or data about data, especially as related to education agencies and education data systems. It discusses metadata as a critical element of sound data management. Chapter 1 describes of the benefits of metadata and examines an education metadata system and its common components.
- **Chapter 2: Using Metadata** focuses on the varied uses of metadata from perspectives including technical metadata, data management metadata, data reporting and use metadata, privacy metadata, and business rules.
- **Chapter 3: Implementing a Metadata System** discusses the process of introducing a metadata system to an existing data management system, from the initial planning and needs assessment through architecture options, the choice to build or buy, and final implementation.
- **Chapter 4: Case Studies** provides examples of the metadata needs and experiences of four SEAs and LEAs, with a look at how metadata were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and how they helped agencies address the needs of students during the crisis.

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