

The Forum Voice

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to 2022, Forum members—doesn't it feel like we've been here before?

The start of last year found us working hard to come to grips with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, as states and districts weighed the most feasible ways to keep educating their students. The question of in-person vs. remote education was still an open one. Now, after a year of further developments and efforts to return all students to

school safely, we find ourselves once again dealing with spiking COVID-19 cases, because of the Omicron variant. Although it sometimes feels like we've ended up right back where we started, as far as the pandemic is concerned, states and districts should be proud of the work done to ensure student learning continued during this unprecedented crisis.

Fortunately, the Forum has not lost its forward momentum. Looking back at what we achieved in 2021, I'm deeply impressed with the way we persevered in our mission, and how this effort has set us up for the year to come. At a time when so many things were slowed down or stalled altogether, the Forum continued to plan, recommend, and develop education data resources that support local, state, and national efforts to improve pre-kindergarten through secondary education throughout the United States.

Even in an environment of generalized telework and remote, virtual, and hybrid learning models, I'm delighted to note the number of successful events we carried off virtually. Consider the events we held throughout the year:

- webinars on disclosure avoidance, transparency, data security, and the Generate software solution, in which we were joined by team members from the Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED);
- panel presentations dedicated to the year's new Forum resources and best practice guides;
- a listening session with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) on the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC);
- and, of course, our first fully virtual Summer Forum Meeting.

For those four days in July, when under different circumstances we would have been gathering in person in Washington, DC, we came together online and held an excellent conference. There were many challenges; some members had trouble connecting to the virtual platform, while others were pulled away from the meeting to attend to work responsibilities. We also missed the networking opportunities that take place during in-person meetings and the opportunity for members who are in different standing committees to connect. Despite those challenges, we discovered some practices (like breakout discussion groups in the standing committees) that we'd like to continue when we hold our next in-person meeting. While grateful for the opportunity to meet online, the virtual Forum meeting made us realize how much more beneficial in-person meetings are for the work of the Forum. In-person summer Forum meetings are by far the most effective method for us to convene as a group, share ideas with our colleagues in other states and districts, and bring best practices and strategies back home with us that help us improve education data in our own states and districts.

Despite the inherent challenges of virtual meetings and collaboration, we have continued to develop new Forum resources and guides—look at the volume and range of what we released in 2021:

- *Forum Guide to Strategies for Education Data Collection and Reporting (SEDCAR)*
- *Forum Guide to Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Data in Virtual and Hybrid Learning Models*
- *Forum Guide to Virtual Education Data: A Resource for Education Agencies*
- *Forum Guide to Staff Records*
- *Forum Guide to Metadata*
- *School Courses for the Exchange of Data (SCED) Version 9* and related resources
- *Feedback on ED Facts Modernization Plans*

None of these would have been possible without the excellent work we did together in working groups and committees, updating existing resources, and creating some new ones as well. That great collaborative energy already has us moving into the new year with working groups on discipline data, digital equity, and education indicators developing another set of useful resources that will benefit education agencies across the country.

It's impossible to forecast what 2022 will bring, but I am confident that our members will continue to display the resilience, dedication, and enthusiasm that have made the Forum a strong cooperative in this turbulent time. To all members—it is a true privilege to serve as Chair of a group like ours. I cannot thank you enough for being a part of the Forum, for bringing your unique perspectives and voices together in pursuit of our mission. And I cannot wait to see what we accomplish together in 2022!

Marilyn King, Forum Chair
Bozeman School District #7 (MT)

NEW FORUM BEST PRACTICE PUBLICATIONS

- ***Forum Guide to Strategies for Education Data Collection and Reporting (SEDCAR)***
The *Forum Guide to SEDCAR* was created to provide timely and useful best practices for education agencies that are interested in designing and implementing a strategy for data collection and reporting, focusing on these as key elements of the larger data process. This new resource is designed to be relevant to the state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) of today, in which data are regularly collected for multiple purposes, and data collection and recording may be conducted by many different individuals within an agency.
- ***Forum Guide to Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Data in Virtual and Hybrid Learning Models***
The *Forum Guide to Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Data in Virtual and Hybrid Learning Models* provides an overview of best practices that will help education agencies collect, report, and use attendance, participation, and engagement data in different learning formats. It was developed as a companion publication to the 2018 *Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data* and incorporates lessons learned by SEAs and LEAs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ***Forum Guide to Virtual Education Data: A Resource for Education Agencies***
The *Forum Guide to Virtual Education Data: A Resource for Education Agencies* is designed 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 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.
- ***Forum Guide to Staff Records***
The *Forum Guide to Staff Records* is intended to help education agencies effectively collect, manage, utilize, and dispose of staff data. The resource provides an overview of the many types of information that may be classified as staff records; effective practices for collecting, maintaining, and protecting the privacy of these records; and information on managing access to the records, including open records requests.
- ***Forum Guide to Metadata***
The *Forum Guide to Metadata* presents and examines how metadata can be used by education agencies to improve data quality and promote a better understanding of education data. The resource highlights the uses of metadata, discusses how to plan and successfully implement a metadata system in an education setting, and provides examples of standard metadata items and definitions to assist agencies with standardization.

NEW FORUM RESOURCES

- ***Feedback on ED Facts Modernization Plans***
The ED Facts Modernization Working Group was convened to provide feedback on the potential plans of ED to modernize ED Facts and provide information on how SEAs map their student information systems (SISs) to federal reporting requirements. The working group provided ED with written feedback from SEAs on ED's ED Facts modernization plans and how SISs map to ED's federal data reporting requirements.
- ***School Courses for the Exchange of Data (SCED) Version 9 and related resources, including SCED Finder, Master List, Training Suite, and SCED Finder Video***

The Forum's SCED Working Group published SCED Version 9 in September 2021. This new version includes new and updated courses that were suggested by SCED users and subject matter experts in federal, state, and local education agencies. Following the release of SCED Version 9, the working group updated the [SCED Master List](#) and the [SCED Finder](#) tool with new and updated courses. The SCED Working Group also developed a [training suite](#) to introduce new users to SCED and help experienced users learn more about SCED; it includes an assessment with an automatically generated certificate for users who successfully pass the assessment. Additionally, the working group developed a [video](#) to introduce the SCED Finder resource.

- ***Data Visualization Online Course: Module 2***

The *Data Visualization Online Course: Module 2* is based on the *Forum Guide to Data Visualization: A Resource for Education Agencies*. This module builds upon the concepts presented in *Module 1: Introduction to Data Visualization* and demonstrates the effective application of data visualization to common education topics through scenarios that highlight recommended best practices.

- ***New Member Training Suite***

The *New Member Training Suite* is designed to introduce newly appointed members to the Forum and help new members understand their responsibilities as Forum members. The training provides information on Forum work and resources and includes an assessment with an automatically generated certificate for users who successfully pass the assessment.



CURRENT WORKING GROUPS

Forum working groups address specific issues and develop resources. The Forum is supporting three working groups, in addition to the group that develops SCED:

- **Discipline Data Working Group:** The working group is developing a new resource that will provide current information and best practices to help education agencies collect, manage, report, and use high-quality, timely, and consistent disciplinary incident data to support students and improve school safety.
- **Digital Equity Working Group:** The working group is developing a new resource that will include information and best practices to help agencies collect digital equity data and then use those data to identify issues and prioritize actions that will help close digital equity gaps.
- **Education Indicators Working Group:** The working group is developing a new resource that provides current information and best practices on education indicators and their ability to support decision-making by supplying useful, valid, reliable, timely, and cost-effective information.
- **SCED Working Group:** The working group is currently planning the development of SCED Version 10. The group is also updating the 2014 *Forum Guide to SCED Classification System* and reorganizing the SCED webpages to improve usability.

Much of the Forum's work is collaborative, and resources often are developed in partnership with national, federal, regional, state, and local education agencies and stakeholders. To support the engagement of the full Forum in the development of Forum resources, Forum working groups may share resource outlines and drafts with the Forum for feedback. Forum members are encouraged to review and comment on drafts and contribute applicable case studies and real-world examples from their agency.



EVENTS

- **Disclosure Avoidance Webinar**
The Forum and PTAC joined efforts to deliver a virtual presentation on February 3, 2021. Frank Miller, ED, and the PTAC team provided an overview of best practices and staff training in the area of disclosure avoidance methodology and public reporting.
- **Data Security and Destruction Best Practices Webinar**
The Forum and PTAC joined efforts to deliver a virtual presentation on March 9, 2021. The PTAC team

provided an overview of current data security best practices for education data systems and best practices for data destruction.

- **Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Panel Presentation**

Jan Petro, formerly of the Colorado Department of Education, Cheryl L. VanNoy, Saint Louis Public Schools (MO), Rachel Kruse, Iowa Department of Education, and Laura Hansen, Metro Nashville Public Schools (TN), participated in a virtual panel presentation on March 25, 2021. The panelists provided an overview of the *Forum Guide to Attendance, Participation, and Engagement Data in Virtual and Hybrid Learning Models*. The panelists also shared information on how their agencies approached these data in spring 2020 and what they are doing for school year 2020-21.

- **Generate Overview and Update Webinar**

Charlotte Ellis, Maine Department of Education, Jill Aurand, Nebraska Department of Education, and members of the Generate team delivered a virtual presentation to the Forum on April 15, 2021. The presentation provided an overview of the Generate solution, described the process for states to implement Generate, and looked at how modernization efforts might leverage this tool for further value-added opportunities.

- **Data Strategy and Metadata Panel Presentation**

Georgia Hughes-Webb, West Virginia Department of Education, Melanie Stewart, Milwaukee Public Schools (WI), and Laura Boudreaux, Louisiana Department of Education, delivered a virtual presentation to the Forum on April 28, 2021. The presentation provided an overview of two Forum resources that are designed to help education agencies enhance their data practices: The *Forum Guide to SEDCAR* and the *Forum Guide to Metadata*. The panelists also shared information on their agencies' data strategies and metadata practices.

- **Summer 2021 Virtual Meeting**

The 2021 Summer Forum Virtual Meeting took place online on July 12-15, 2021. Past Forum Vice Chair Marilyn King, Bozeman School District #7 (MT), introduced the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Commissioner Peggy Carr and Associate Commissioner Chris Chapman, who welcomed members to the meeting and provided a brief overview of the School Pulse Panel. Past Forum Chair Dean Folkers, formerly of the Nebraska Department of Education, introduced joint session presentations that addressed several timely topics in education data: Steven Hernandez, chief information security officer at ED, discussed cybersecurity in SEAs and LEAs; Marilyn King, Cheryl L. VanNoy, Saint Louis Public Schools (MO), Jan Petro, formerly of the Colorado Department of Education, Charlotte Ellis, Maine Department of Education, Dena Dossett, Jefferson County Public Schools (KY), Peggy Jones, Pasco County Schools (FL), and Allen Miedema, Northshore School District (WA) participated in a panel presentation on virtual education and attendance; Kelly Worthington, Barbara Timm, and Stephanie Miller, ED, provided an update on ED*Facts* and the CRDC; and Frank E. Miller Jr. and the PTAC Team presented on working with online service providers and apps. Standing committees met to discuss topics of interest to committee members, including cybersecurity, the impact of the pandemic on data and education, virtual education, attendance, and more. Detailed notes for all joint sessions, standing committee, and Steering Committee meetings are available on the Forum website at https://nces.ed.gov/forum/meeting_notes.asp.

- **Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) Listening Session with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR)**

The Forum and OCR joined efforts to hold a listening session on the CRDC on September 17, 2021. Suzanne Goldberg, Monique Dixon, and Stephanie Miller, ED, met with Forum members to discuss the CRDC schedule, collection window, data quality, communication, and data elements. OCR and Forum members also discussed the proposed 2021-22 CRDC information collection request (ICR). ED is current soliciting comments on the ICR; interested persons are invited to view the ICR and submit comments on or before February 11, 2022: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/12/13/2021-26873/agency-information-collection-activities-comment-request-mandatory-civil-rights-data-collection>.

- **Transparency Webinar**

The Forum and PTAC joined efforts to deliver a virtual presentation on December 13, 2021. PTAC provided

information on transparency best practices for SEAs and LEAs, as well as an overview of the recent report, [LEA Website Student Privacy Transparency Reviews - Combined Three-Year Report Summary](#).

- **Upcoming Events**

The Forum is planning Forum webinars and virtual meetings on topics of interest to Forum members. Event details, including dates, topics, and speakers, will be shared on the Forum email lists as more information becomes available.



RELATED FEDERAL PROGRAMS

- **Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)**

The CRDC is a biennial (every other school year) survey of public schools that collects data from public LEAs and schools on leading civil rights indicators related to access and barriers to educational opportunity at the early childhood through grade 12 levels.

- **Common Education Data Standards (CEDs)**

The CEDs initiative is a voluntary common vocabulary, data model, and suite of implementation tools to help education stakeholders understand and use comparable education data throughout the early learning through postsecondary and workforce settings.

- **EDFacts**

EDFacts is an ED initiative to collect, analyze, and promote the use of high-quality, PreK-12 data by centralizing performance data supplied by K-12 SEAs with other data assets within ED to enable better analysis and use in policy development, planning, and management.

- **Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC)**

PTAC, located within ED's Student Privacy Policy Office, was established as a "one-stop" resource for education stakeholders to learn about data privacy, confidentiality, and security practices related to student-level data systems and other uses of student data.

- **Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs)**

The REL program is a network of ten laboratories that serve the educational needs of a designated region by providing access to high-quality, scientifically valid education research through applied research, development projects, studies, and other technical assistance activities. The RELs are associate members of the Forum, intending to help the RELs and Forum members develop mutually beneficial relationships.

- **Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program**

Through grants and a range of services and resources, the SLDS Grant Program has helped propel the successful design, development, implementation, and expansion of K-12 and early learning through the workforce longitudinal data systems.



NEWSLETTER INFORMATION

The *Forum Voice* is released as an electronic publication. To contact the Forum, email [Ghedam Bairu](mailto:Ghedam.Bairu).



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