

Common Core of Data (CCD)

Website: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>

Updated: August 2018

1. OVERVIEW

The Common Core of Data (CCD) is the National Center of Education Statistics' (NCES) primary database on public elementary and secondary education in the United States. Every year the CCD collects information from the universe of state education agencies (SEAs) on all public elementary and secondary schools and education agencies in the United States. The CCD provides descriptive data about staff and students at the school, school district, and state levels. Information about revenues and expenditures is collected at the school district and state levels. The integrated CCD was first implemented in the 1986–87 school year.

Purpose

To provide basic statistical information on all children in this country receiving a public education from prekindergarten through grade 12 and information on the funds collected and expended for providing public elementary and secondary education. The specific objectives of the CCD are to (1) provide an official listing of public elementary and secondary schools and education agencies in the nation, which can be used to select samples for other NCES surveys; and (2) provide basic information and descriptive statistics on public elementary and secondary schools and schooling.

Components

There are six components to the CCD: the Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey, Local Education Agency Universe Survey, State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education, National Public Education Financial Survey (NPEFS), School District Finance Survey, and Dropout and Completers Survey. The CCD surveys consist of data submitted annually to NCES by state education agencies in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools,¹ the Department of Defense Education Activity, Puerto Rico, and the four outlying U.S. Island Areas (American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands).

Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey. This survey collects information on all public elementary and secondary schools in the United States. There were 98,456 operating public elementary/secondary schools in school year (SY) 2015–16; this number includes 1,253 new schools that opened for the first time. States reported that 1,160 schools closed since SY 2014–15. Most operating schools were regular schools (89,644) that were primarily responsible for instruction in the standard curriculum as well as other areas. An additional 2,011 schools focused primarily on special education services; 1,419 schools were identified as vocational schools; and 5,382 were identified as alternative education schools.

Data include the school's mailing address, telephone number, operating status, and type ("regular" or focused on a special area such as vocational education). The survey also collects the student enrollment (membership) for every grade taught in the school; number of students in each of seven racial/ethnic groups; number of students eligible for

SURVEY OF THE UNIVERSE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

CCD collects data through these major components:

- Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey
- Local Education Agency Universe Survey (i.e., school district survey)
- State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education (i.e., state aggregate nonfiscal survey)
- National Public Education Financial Survey (i.e., state-level financial survey)
- School District Finance Survey
- Dropout and Completers

¹ The BIE assumed administration of these schools from the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 2006.

the free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) programs; and number of classroom teachers, reported as full-time equivalents (FTEs).

In the 1998–99 school year, several variables were added: location address (if different from mailing address); Title I, magnet, and charter school status; number of students eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch programs; number of migrant students enrolled the previous year (although this variable was later removed); and enrollment broken out by race and sex within grade.

Starting with SY 2014–15, the geographic data elements (latitude/longitude, county, congressional district, locale type) previously included on the LEA and School universe files are published separately by NCES' geography program.

Starting with SY 2014–15, data for grade 13 and adult education are now included in the CCD. In SY 2014–15, 109 schools in 5 states reported offering a grade 13. Adult education was offered by fewer than 500 LEAs and 600 schools in 10 states.

Local Education Agency Universe Survey. This survey serves as a directory of basic information on local education agencies (LEAs). There were 18,328 operating LEAs in SY 2015–16, including 274 new agencies that opened for the first time. States reported that 195 LEAs closed since SY 2014–15. Most operating agencies were regular ones (13,584) that were responsible for educating students residing within their jurisdiction. A total of 1,377 operating agencies were supervisory unions (218) or regional education service agencies (1,159) that typically provided services to other LEAs. A total of 2,964 were independent charter agencies in which all the associated schools were charter schools. An additional 403 agencies were operated by state (263) or federal and other agencies (140).

CCD collects the LEA mailing address, telephone number, and type. The survey includes, for the current year, the total number of students enrolled (membership) in prekindergarten through grade 12 (with counts within grade level by race/ethnicity and sex); number of ungraded students; number of English language learner (ELL) students served in appropriate programs; and number of instructional, support, and administrative staff. It includes, for the previous year, the number of high school graduates, other completers, and grade 7–12 dropouts.

State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education. This survey collects information on all students and staff aggregated to the state level, including number of students by grade level, and within grade level, by race/ethnicity and sex; counts of FTE staff by instructional, support, and administrative staff, and high

school completers by race/ethnicity. Through school year 2005–06, data on high school completers and dropouts were collected for the previous year. The collection cycle for school year 2006–07 was a transition year when both prior- and current-year data on high school completers and dropouts were collected. Since 2006–07, the high school completion and dropout data have been separated from the data on student enrollment and staff; as such, student enrollment and staffing data have been released as a standalone data file since 2006–07.

National Public Education Financial Survey (NPEFS). This survey collects detailed finance data at the state level, including average daily attendance, revenues by source (local, state, federal), and expenditures by function (instruction, support services, and noninstruction) and object (salaries, supplies, etc.). It also reports capital outlay and debt service expenditures. Revenues and expenditures are audited after the close of the fiscal year and are then submitted to NCES by each state education agency. In FY 14, the 50 states and the District of Columbia reported \$623.2 billion in revenues collected for public elementary and secondary education. Total revenues increased by 1.6 percent (from \$613.2 to \$623.2 billion) for FY 14 compared to FY 13. Current expenditures increased 1.7 percent (from \$544.2 to \$553.5 billion) for FY 14 compared to FY 13 (after adjusting for inflation).

The NPEFS underwent a major revision in fiscal year (FY) 1989, acquiring its present name in that year and greatly increasing the number of data items collected. Since that year, additional items have been added to and deleted from the survey. In the FY 89 data collection, NCES also began providing “crosswalk” software to assist states in their reporting and to improve the comparability of data across states. This software converts a state’s existing accounting reports to uniform federal standards, as described in the NCES accounting handbook (Allison, Honegger, and Johnson 2009). The most recent change in the NPEFS is the addition of teacher salary expenditures broken out by program (regular, special education, vocational, and other education program), as well as the addition of textbook expenditures. Data on expenditures from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was collected and reported separately for fiscal years 2009 through 2014. For additional information on NPEFS data collections, see also <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/stfis.asp>.

School District Finance Survey. This survey collects detailed data by school district, including revenues by source, expenditures by function and subfunction, and enrollment. The national median of total revenues per pupil across all LEAs was \$12,131 in FY 14, which represents an increase of 1.6 percent from FY 13, reversing a decrease of 1.7 percent between FY 12 and FY 13, after adjusting for inflation. The national median of current

expenditures per pupil among all LEAs was \$10,311 in FY 14, an increase of 1.0 percent from FY 13, and reversing a decrease of 0.5 percent between FY 12 and FY 13.

These data are collected by the Governments Division of the U.S. Census Bureau and are released as the Annual Survey of Local Government Finances (F-33). Before FY 95, data were collected from all districts in decennial census years (e.g., 1990) and years ending in 2 and 7, and from a large sample in other years. The F-33 was first conducted in FY 80. Beginning with FY 95, detailed fiscal data on revenues and expenditures have been collected for all school districts providing public education to students in prekindergarten through grade 12. These data can be linked to the nonfiscal data collected in the Local Education Agency Universe Survey. Student counts and amounts of debt at the beginning and end of the fiscal year are also provided. NCES began to substantially support the F-33 in FY 92.

In FY 97, two variables, Payments to Private Schools and Payments to Public Charter Schools, were added. In FY 1998, two variables that describe the nature of school districts and their relation to other surveys and data files were added: AGCHRT and CENFILE. AGCHRT identifies school districts with charter schools, and CENFILE identifies those districts that are available in the Census Bureau's version of the F-33 school district file. Similar to changes in the NPEFS, teacher salary and textbook exhibit items were added to the F-33 beginning with the FY 04 collection. Special exhibit items are separate data items that are included in, but do not summarize to, other data items. Starting with the FY 05 collection, the data item Federal Revenue—Bilingual Education (B11) was moved from the “federal revenue direct” section to the “federal revenue through the state” section. This change was made as a result of changes in the allocation of bilingual education funds by the U.S. Department of Education. In the FY 06 collection, four new local revenue items were added: rents and royalties, sale of property, fines and forfeits, and private contributions. Data on expenditures from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was collected and reported separately for fiscal years 2009 through 2014. For additional information on state fiscal data reports, see also https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pub_rev_exp.asp.

Dropout and Completers. Since 2007–08, the high school dropout and completion data have been separated from the LEA universe survey data and released as standalone data files. Dropout data were first collected in the 1992–93 CCD, reflecting dropouts for the 1991–92 school year. In 2006–07, the CCD collected both the prior- and current-year number of high school graduates, other completers, and grade 7–12 dropouts. Since 2007–08, however, only

current-year data on high school completers and dropouts have been collected.

Teacher Compensation Survey. This survey was a research and development effort by CCD. It was administered for the school years 2006–06 through 2010–11. The TCS collected total compensation, teacher status, and demographic data about individual teachers from multiple states. NCES launched the pilot Teacher Compensation Survey (TCS) data collection in 2007, with seven states volunteering to provide administrative records for school year (SY) 2005–06. The TCS expanded to 17 states reporting SY 2006–07 and SY 2007–08 data. Maximum participation was achieved with the SY 2009–10 collection when 26 states submitted data. The TCS file can be merged with the CCD Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey file. Unique ID numbers are used to track teachers within states over time. The data are released as a restricted-use file, available to researchers with an IES data license. The data items on the restricted-use file include: Teacher ID, NCES School ID, FTE, base salary, total salary, employee benefits, years of teaching experience, highest degree earned, race, age, and teacher status codes. Teachers at more than one school will have a record for each school they teach in, and the FTE and salary values are for the teacher at that school only. Summary descriptive statistics are released in public use files. The public use files include teachers' mean base salary, level of education, and mean base salary by varying levels of experience at the school and LEA level.

Periodicity

Annual. Some of the component surveys were initiated during the 1930s. In its integrated form, the CCD was introduced in the 1986–87 school year.

Data Availability

Public-use data files for CCD through the 2015–16 data collection can be obtained at <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/ccddata.asp>.

2. USES OF DATA

The CCD collects three categories of information: (1) general descriptive information on schools and school districts, including name, address, and phone number.; (2) data on students and staff, including demographic characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity); and (3) fiscal data covering revenues and current expenditures. The datasets within the CCD can be used separately or jointly to provide information on many topics related to education. The ease of linking CCD data with other datasets makes the CCD an even more valuable resource.

Not only is the CCD a source of data that can be used to demonstrate relationships between different school, district, and state characteristics, it can also provide a historical record of schools or agencies of interest. This information can shed light on how and why education in the United States is changing. The types of schools or districts that have changed the most with respect to a measured characteristic (e.g., proportion of Hispanic students) can be identified, and the reasons for these changes can be independently investigated. Similarly, the impact of state and local education policies and practices can be assessed through an examination of changes in school and district characteristics. For example, districts that have shown substantial improvement in their racial balance or interracial exposure indices can be identified. The policies and practices employed by these districts can then be examined. By identifying the presence of significant changes and where these changes are occurring, CCD data can help policymakers and practitioners better target their efforts and help researchers develop more sharply focused hypotheses for investigating key education issues.

3. KEY CONCEPTS

The concepts described below pertain to the levels of data collection (school, agency, state) and school locale in the CCD. For a comprehensive list of CCD terms and definitions, refer to the glossaries in various CCD annual publications (such as CCD files and documentation, First Look reports, and technical user guides) available at <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>.

Local Education Agency (LEA). An LEA has administrative responsibility for providing instruction or specialized services to one or more elementary or secondary schools. Most LEAs are *regular school districts* that are locally administered and directly responsible for educating children. Others are *supervisory unions* (which provide administrative systems for the smaller regular districts with which they are associated); *regional education service agencies* (which offer research, data processing, special education or vocational program management, and other services to a number of client school districts); *state-operated school districts* (e.g., for the deaf and blind); *federally operated school districts* (e.g., operated by the Department of Defense Education Activity); and *other agencies* not meeting the definitions of the preceding categories (e.g., operated by a Department of Corrections). Since school year 2007–08, a charter agency type code has been used to differentiate charter agencies from other types of agencies.

Public Elementary/Secondary School. An institution that is linked with an education agency, serves students, and has an administrator. It is possible for more than one CCD-

defined school to exist at a single location (e.g., an elementary and secondary school sharing a building, each with its own principal). One school may also be spread across several locations (e.g., a multiple “storefront” learning center managed by a single administrator).

The CCD classifies schools by type. *Regular schools* provide instruction leading ultimately toward a standard high school diploma; they may also offer a range of specialized services. *Special education* and *vocational schools* have the provision of specialized services as their primary purpose. *Other alternative schools* focus on an instructional area not covered by the first three types (e.g., developing basic language and numeracy skills of adolescents at risk of dropping out of school).

Some schools do not report any students in *membership* (i.e., enrolled on the official CCD reporting day of October 1). This occurs when students are enrolled in more than one school but are reported for only one. For example, students whose instruction is divided between a regular and a vocational school may be reported only in membership for the regular school. In other cases, a school may send the students for which it is responsible to another school for their education—a situation most likely in a small community that does not have sufficient students to warrant keeping a school open every year.

School Locale. Beginning with the 2006–07 CCD files, the locale code methodology was changed from a 1-digit code based on metropolitan statistical areas to a 2-digit code based on urban clusters. To distinguish the two systems, the new system is referred to as “urban-centric locale codes.” The urban-centric locale code system classifies territory into four major types: city, suburban, town, and rural. Each type has three subcategories. For city and suburb, these are gradations of size – large, midsize, and small. Towns and rural areas are further distinguished by their distance from an urbanized area. They can be characterized as fringe, distant, or remote. The new system has 12 urban-centric locale codes. American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (overseas) were not assigned a locale code because the geographic and governmental structures of these entities do not fit the definitional scheme used to derive the code.

4. SURVEY DESIGN

Target Population

The target population includes all public elementary and secondary schools, LEAs, and SEAs throughout the United States, including the District of Columbia, the Department

of Defense Education Activity², BIE schools, Puerto Rico, and the four U.S. Island Areas.

Sample Design

The CCD collects information from the universe of state-level education agencies.

Data Collection and Processing

Through the 2005–06 collection, CCD data were voluntarily obtained from administrative records collected and edited by SEAs during their regular state reporting cycle. In 2006–07, CCD nonfiscal data reporting became mandatory for SEAs.

In 2007–08, reporting CCD nonfiscal data to *EDFacts*, a new data collection system, became mandatory for SEAs. SEAs now annually submit over 100 data files through the *EDFacts* Submission System (ESS).

The school year (SY) 2015–16 collection was the first CCD collection processed completely through *EDFacts*' Partner Support Center (PSC) and the new Data Management System (DMS). The PSC used the DMS to reach out to SEAs and resolve any data issues. When errors in data were found, SEAs were encouraged to resubmit the data file through ESS.

Reference dates. Most data for the nonfiscal surveys are collected for a particular school year (September through August). The official reference date is October 1st or the closest school day to October 1st. Special education, free-lunch eligibility, and racial/ethnic counts may be taken on December 1st or the closest school day to that date. Student and teacher data are reported for the current school year, whereas through 2005–06, data for high school graduates, other completers, and dropouts reflected the previous year. Fiscal data are for the previous fiscal year; FY 98 data represent the 1997–98 school year.

Data collection. The ways in which CCD data are collected have evolved with the advancement of technology. In the early days of the collection, survey instruments were usually distributed to the states in January. Starting in the 2001–02 collection, downloadable PC software was used. In 2004–05, a web-based data collection application was developed and put into use. A state CCD coordinator, appointed by the Chief State School Officer, is responsible for overseeing the completion of the surveys (often, different coordinators are responsible for the fiscal and the nonfiscal surveys). To ensure comparable data across states, NCES provides the

CCD coordinator with a set of standard critical definitions for all survey items. In addition, data conferences and training sessions are held at least yearly. The state's data plan identifies any definitional differences between the state's recordkeeping and the CCD's collection as well as any adjustments made by the state to achieve comparability. Counts across CCD surveys may not be identical, but differences should be consistent and the state is asked to describe the reason for any discrepancy.

NCES provides the state with general information collected during the previous survey on each district and school (e.g., name, address, phone number, locale code, and type of school/district). This information must be verified as correct by the CCD coordinator or recoded with the correct information. The coordinator must also assign appropriate identification codes to new schools and agencies and update the operational status codes for schools and agencies that have closed.

Beginning with the 2005–06 school year, the CCD nonfiscal data were collected through the U.S. Department of Education's Education Data Exchange Network (EDEN). States reported data to EDEN through multiple file groups that fall into various reporting schedules throughout the year. Although states could report data outside the collection period and could revise their reported data at any time in EDEN, NCES extracted the data files from EDEN on the cutoff dates of data submission. The data resubmitted by states after the files were extracted may or may not be included in the CCD final release file. In 2007–08, *EDFacts* superseded EDEN as the data collection system used to collect CCD nonfiscal data.

Data for the CCD fiscal surveys and the TCS are collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. The data are compiled into prescribed formats and submitted by the SEAs. The closing date for the current year's data is the Tuesday following Labor Day. Corrections to submitted fiscal data are accepted until October 1st, however, only corrections that lower a state's current expenditure per pupil are accepted after the "Labor Tuesday" deadline for use in the formula for allocating Title I and other Department of Education funding to state and local school systems.

Editing. Completed surveys undergo comprehensive editing by NCES and the states. Where data are determined to be inconsistent, missing, or out of range, NCES contacts the SEAs for verification. Review and editing of data for collections prior to SY 2015–16, were done by the Census bureau. Census prepared exception reports that were annotated and sent to SEAs and used as a basis for resolving data anomalies. Starting with SY 2015–16, NCES is processing nonfiscal data through its Data Management System, which provides an online

² Prior to 2010–11, the Department of Defense, Overseas reported separately from the Department of Defense, Domestic. Starting in 2010–11, they report as a single unit, the Department of Defense Education Activity.

application for exception reports and the exchange of information to resolve data issues. Records are processed through a post-edit check to replace blanks and nonmeaningful zeroes with meaningful responses. After editing, final adjustments for missing data are performed.

Beginning in SY 2009–10, NCES implemented a revised editing methodology for agency and school data to improve the precision of edits in identifying errors. The revised methodology used data from multiple years and was applied to both the reported data items and related ratios. More information on these “multi-year” edits is included in the documentation of the CCD data files (<http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/stnfis.asp>). Prior to SY 2015–16 SEAs were allowed greater latitude in reporting counts for zero, missing, and not-applicable values. With the implementation of DMS and increased standardization of guidance in the file specifications provided to SEAs, ED*Facts* has required greater precision from SEAs in distinguishing between zero, missing, and not-applicable values.

Estimation Methods

NCES estimates missing values to improve data comparability across states. Only state-level data are estimated on a regular basis. Missing values in the Public School Universe and Local Agency Universe Surveys are generally left as missing, with a few exceptions.

There are two basic estimation methods: imputation and edits. *Imputation* is performed when the missing value for a data item is not reported at all indicating that subtotals and totals containing the category are underreported. Imputation assigns a value to the missing item, and the subtotals and totals containing this item are increased by the amount of the imputation. *Edits* correct and adjust reported data. They are used to correct cases in which a value reported for one item incorrectly contains a value for one or more additional items not reported. For example, a state might not differentiate between kindergarten teachers and prekindergarten teachers, reporting “-1” (missing) for prekindergarten teachers and a value representing the count of staff for both categories as kindergarten teachers. CCD survey staff edits these two responses by reducing the amount reported for kindergarten teachers and adding that amount to prekindergarten teachers. The total count for teachers would not be affected by this edit. As well, edits may also be used to change reported data to prevent identification of individuals. Totals and subtotals are recalculated after all imputations and edits have been performed. Last, if it is not possible to impute or adjust for a missing value, the item is set to 0 (“no occurrences”), -1 (“missing”), or -2 (“not applicable”).

Most data elements in the files have a companion cell with a flag indicating whether the data contents were reported

by the state (R) or placed there by NCES using one of several methodologies: edit (A); imputation based on the prior year’s data (P); imputation based on a method other than the prior year’s data (I); totaling based on the sum of internal or external detail (T); or combining with data provided elsewhere by the state (C). There is also a code (D) to flag for first-year disaggregated.

Estimating state-level nonfiscal data. NCES imputes and edits some reported values for student and staff counts at the state level (including the District of Columbia). Imputations for prekindergarten students are performed first, followed by staff imputations and then other edits. In the 2015–16 collection, there were a number of cases (13 distinct values in 7 states) where the same values in the same states had been imputed by the same method for three or more years in a row. NCES decided to leave these values as missing rather than impute for a fourth year in a row.

Estimating state-level fiscal data. NCES also imputes and edits revenue and expenditure data. The federal standard (see Allison, Honegger, and Johnson 2009) is used in the edits to distribute expenditure and revenue data. Edits are also used to distribute direct state support expenditures to specific objects and functions. In some cases, local revenues from student activities and food services are imputed.

Future Plans

Because it is an ongoing annual survey, the CCD engages in continuous planning with its data users and providers.

5. DATA QUALITY AND COMPARABILITY

The data in the CCD are obtained from the universe of SEAs, which are provided with a common set of definitions for all data items requested. In addition, for the CCD fiscal surveys, NCES provides crosswalk software that converts a state’s existing accounting reports to the federal standard, as indicated in *Financial Accounting for Local and State School Systems, 2009 Edition* (Allison, Honegger, and Johnson 2009). This ensures the most comparable and comprehensive information possible across states. As with any survey, however, there are possible sources of error, as described below.

Sampling Error

Because the CCD is a universe survey, its data are not subject to sampling errors.

Nonsampling Error

Coverage error. An NCES report by Owens and Bose (1997), found that overall coverage in the 1994–95 Local Education Agency Universe Survey was 96.2 percent of

that in state education directories. “Regular” agencies—those traditionally responsible for providing public education—had almost total coverage. Most coverage discrepancies were attributed to nontraditional agencies that provide special education, vocational education, and other services.

Nonresponse Error

Unit nonresponse. The unit of response in the CCD is the SEA. Under current NCES standards, the regular components of the CCD are likely to receive at least partial information from every state, resulting in a 100 percent unit response rate.

Item nonresponse. Any data item missing for one school district is generally missing for other districts in the same state. The following items have higher than normal nonresponse: free-lunch-eligible students by school; nontraditional agencies; and dropouts. Some states assign all ungraded students to one grade and therefore do not report any ungraded students.

Several items have shown marked improvement in response during recent years. Student enrollment was only reported for 80 percent of the districts in 1986–87, but is now available for almost 100 percent. Reports of student race/ethnicity at the school level has increased from 63 percent in the 1987–88 school year (when first requested) to nearly 100 percent today.

Measurement error. Measurement error typically results from varying interpretations of NCES definitions, differing record keeping systems in the states, and failures to distinguish between zero, missing, and inapplicable in the reporting of data. NCES attempts to minimize these errors by working closely with the state CCD coordinators.

Definitional differences. Although states follow a common set of definitions in their CCD reports, the differences in how states organize education lead to some limitations in the reporting of data, particularly regarding dropouts. CCD definitions appear to be less problematic in the NPEFS, although data on average daily attendance in this survey are not comparable across states. States provide figures for average daily attendance in accordance with state law; NCES provides a definition for states to use in the absence of state law. Because of this lack of comparability, student membership counts from the State Nonfiscal Survey are used as the official state counts.

Because not all states follow the CCD dropout definition and reporting specifications, dropout counts cannot be compared accurately across states. For states that do not comply with the CCD definition, the dropout count is blanked out in the database and considered missing. Currently, there is considerable variation across local, state, and federal data collections on how to define

dropouts. The CCD’s definition differs from that in other data sources, including the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009, and the Current Population Survey (CPS), conducted by the Census Bureau. Although the collection of dropout information in the CCD is designed to be consistent with procedures in the CPS, differences remain. CCD dropout data are obtained from state administrative records (whereas the CPS obtains this information from a household survey). The CCD includes dropouts in grades 7 through 12 (whereas the CPS includes only grades 10 through 12).

States also vary in the kinds of high school completion credentials on which they collect data. Some states issue a single diploma regardless of the student’s course of study. Others award a range of different credentials depending upon whether the student completed the regular curriculum or addressed an individualized set of education goals. Unreported information is shown as missing in CCD data files and published tables unless it is possible to impute or adjust a value.

Changes in state reporting practices. The basic characteristics of a school or district do not change frequently. However, a minor change in local or statewide reporting practices (such as two or three coordinators instructing schools to review all of their general information) can have a large impact on the reliability and validity of CCD items. In the 1990–91 school year, a significant proportion (7 percent) of schools, primarily in three states, reported a change in locale code from the prior survey. While this undoubtedly provided better information on school locales in these states, data became less comparable across years. Such changes are rare, however, and tend to be clustered by state and year.

Data Comparability

Most CCD items can be used to assess changes over time by state, district, and school. However, checks of the prevalence and patterns of nonresponse should be performed to assess the feasibility of any analysis. There may also be discontinuities in the data resulting from the introduction of new survey items, changes in state reporting practices, etc., and there may be inconsistencies across reporting levels in the numbers for the same data element (e.g., number of students).

Content changes. As new items are added to the CCD, NCES encourages states to incorporate into their own survey systems the items they do not already collect so that these data will be available in future rounds of the CCD. Over time, this has resulted in fewer missing data cells in each state’s response, thus reducing the need to impute data. Users should keep in mind, however, that while the restructuring of data collection systems can produce more

complete and valid data, it can also make data less comparable over time. For example, prior to FY 89, public revenues were aggregated into four categories and expenditures into three functions. Because these broad categories did not provide policymakers with sufficient detail to understand changes in the fiscal conditions of states, the survey was expanded in 1990 to collect detailed data on all public revenues and expenditures within states for regular education in prekindergarten through grade 12.

Comparisons within the CCD. A major goal of the CCD is to provide comparable information across all surveys. The surveys are designed so that the schools in the Public School Universe survey are reflected in the Local Agency Universe survey and so that the data from these surveys are reflected in the State Nonfiscal survey. While counts may not always be equal across reporting levels or even within the same level, differences should be consistent and explainable.

For the most part, the total number of students in a regular district is close to the aggregated number of students in all of the district's schools. Since 1990, there has typically been agreement between these counts in at least 85 percent of the districts. Membership numbers in the Public School Universe and Local Agency Universe surveys may legitimately differ if (1) there are students served by the district but not accounted to any school (e.g., hospitalized or homebound students); or (2) there are schools operated by the state Board of Education rather than by a local agency. To avoid confusion, NCES publishes the numbers of students and staff from the State Nonfiscal Survey as the official counts for each state.

6. CONTACT INFORMATION

For content information on the CCD, contact the following individuals:

Nonfiscal Data

Mark Glander
Phone: (202) 245-7427
E-mail: mark.glander@ed.gov

Fiscal Data

Stephen Cornman
Phone: (202) 245-7753
E-mail: stephen.cornman@ed.gov

Directory Files and Data Use

Patrick Keaton
Phone: (202) 245-7675
E-mail: patrick.keaton@ed.gov

Mailing Address for All Contacts

National Center for Education Statistics
Institute of Education Sciences

Potomac Center Plaza
550 12th Street, SW, Room 4173
Washington, DC 20202

7. METHODOLOGY AND EVALUATION REPORTS

General

Allison, G.S., Honegger, S.D., and Johnson, F. (2009). *Financial Accounting for Local and State School Systems: 2009 Edition* (NCES 2009-325). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

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