

**AERA Special Interest Group on  
School Indicators and Profiles  
NEWSLETTER**

**March 2005**

**AERA 2005  
Annual Meeting  
April 11–15, 2005, Montréal**

**Theme: Demography and Democracy in the Era of Accountability**

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**Welcome to New SIG:SIP Members**

**By *Ellen Forte-Fast***

I invite all of you to actively take part in the SIG through attending our sessions at AERA, sending a news item to our newsletter editor, submitting a paper for next year's conference, or volunteering as a paper reviewer. If you attend AERA, please attend our business meeting and introduce yourself. We look forward to seeing you.

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# A Note From the Chair

**Ellen Forte-Fast**

If you work with education data like most of our membership do, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) has reshaped your job in some way. The NCLB mandates have meant more extensive reporting under tighter timelines and with higher stakes for schools and districts. This has put tremendous pressure on those responsible for data quality and reporting and has certainly contributed to the chorus of criticism of the law. But, it is quite possible that this pressure might ultimately yield some very positive results for our field. Unfortunately, it might also lead to some reporting that is not as useful as one might hope.

On the positive side, although there are indeed aspects of the law that need serious rethinking, many of us “data-geeks” have been quite pleased with the new focus on data quality and on reporting in a way that actually communicates something meaningful to those who are not so facile with metrics and error bands. Within state agencies across the country, some officials are beginning to listen to staffers who understand the intricacies of data systems and the complexities of multi-tiered, purposed reporting. Public education reporting has improved not just in quantity with NCLB, but in quality as evidenced by the evolution of states’ report cards over the past few years (attend the sessions on our program for excellent examples). Reporting is becoming more focused on supporting the appropriate interpretation and use of data than on merely listing numbers.

However, it seems that much of this progress has been overlooked, discounted, misunderstood, or simply not rapid enough for some organizations with the power and resources to publish independently their own report cards for schools. Although auxiliary reporting can be of great benefit when agencies can’t or won’t disseminate information on their own, such reporting may actually increase the burden on states and can confuse users who receive conflicting messages about how their schools are performing. Thus, it carries its own set of problems and must itself be monitored by those who really understand the data and their appropriate uses.

The partnership between Standard & Poor’s (S&P), the CELT Corporation, Achieve, Inc., and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is one example of auxiliary reporting. The project is funded by The Broad Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and represents both great potential and great risk for confusion and overburdening state and local education agencies.

As described on the Achieve, Inc., website, this project is intended to “help leverage the power of objective, publicly accessible data analyses to guide sound decisionmaking and education policy.” It encompasses three components:

- “S&P will collect and analyze the academic, demographic and financial data that states currently collect. S&P’s written analysis and supporting data will be provided to the public on Standard & Poor’s Web site, along with a suite of interactive tools that make the data useful to parents, educators, school and district

leaders, and state policymakers. The S&P site is expected to launch in late March 2005.

- “Achieve and CCSSO will help local, state and national policymakers apply the data and analyses to address education policy issues.
- “The CELT Corporation will help participating states assess the capabilities of their data collection infrastructure and provide a blueprint to overcome obstacles.”

I should note that CCSSO entered this partnership late and, as their representatives have explained to state agencies, for joined the purpose of looking after states’ interests.

S&P plans to collect as much information as possible from states’ websites, the CCD, and the Performance-Based Information Management Initiative database. However, since some of these data may represent different points or ranges in time (e.g., achievement data for the 2003-04 school year and fiscal data for the 2003 fiscal year) and perhaps don’t correspond exactly with what the S&P assumptions, states are welcome to provide other data files to the partnership.

But, states have no say in how their data are analyzed or presented and, to date, have not had an adequate chance to analyze the analytical model prior to its application to their data. While S&P reports a variety of data, its focus is primarily on the relationship between the money a district spends and student achievement in that district.

This may be very useful information. But, states who have already participated in the data collection for this site have expressed frustration with the partnership’s somewhat limited understanding and appreciation of their data and its unwillingness to provide caveats regarding data interpretation on the website. Further, state and local agencies, who have gotten very little information about the analysis model, will have to respond to media questions about what the partnership’s reports mean. That doesn’t really seem fair.

If the partnership really wants to meet its stated goals, it should spend more time learning about states’ data and how well these data are already being presented on many states’ own websites. Further, states should be given in-depth information about the analysis methodology so they can better respond to question from their educators and the media. If the purpose of the website is to provide information that can be used to improve education, then it seems that communication with educators should be a priority.

State and local educators will have to keep their eyes on this one, as well as the other sites that present their data in various forms. So, while we have come a long way in the field of education reporting in the past few years, there remain more than a few battles in the years ahead. How’s that for job security, eh?

See you in Montreal!

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## **Our AERA 2005 Montreal Line-Up**

*By Barbara Clements*

*ESP Solutions Group*

*Program Chair*

**We have an excellent program this year, and invite everyone to attend and participate in these sessions.**

### **SIG: School Indicators and Profiles – 2005 AERA Program**

Many thanks go to our reviewers.

### **Innovations in State Report Cards and Accountability Reporting: Strategies for Reporting Under NCLB-Part I**

Wednesday, April 13, 10:35-12:05, Le Centre Sheraton Montreal/Salon A

Presenters:

Peter Prowda – Connecticut State Department of Education - Chair  
Robin Taylor – Delaware State Department of Education  
Mitchell D. Chester – Ohio Department of Education  
Cathy Wagner – Minnesota Department of Education  
Arie J. van der Ploeg – Learning Point Associates - Discussant

Many state education agencies have made significant changes and improvements in their design and methods of accountability reporting in the past two years. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 placed significant new responsibilities on states and school districts for monitoring and reporting on the quality of education in the nation's public schools (i.e., accountability). But in addition, it outlined new responsibilities for ensuring that assistance is provided to schools to advance the progress of all students. The symposium will include live demonstrations of state reporting online websites, and a lively discussion with experts in the field.

### **Using Indicators for Decision Making**

Wednesday, April 13, 12:25-1:05 pm, Marriott Montreal Chateau Champlain/Salle de Bal Ballroom and Foyer

Developing a Balanced Scorecard of Indicators for Improving Charter School Accountability and Decision-Making – Priscilla Wohlstetter, John Sun, Deborah Santiago

Complex High-Stakes Indicator Development: Professional Compensation for Teachers  
– Joyce R. McLarty (Arie van der Ploeg will present this paper on behalf of Dr. McLarty)

**Indicators of School Performance: School Indicators and Profiles SIG Business Meeting**

Wednesday, April 13, 6:15-8:15 pm, Le Centre Sheraton Montreal/Hemon

Presenters:

- Ellen Forte Fast – edCount, LLC – SIG Chair
- Wayne M. Garrison – Pais, Inc.
- Charles T. Williams - National Education Association

**Innovations in State Report Cards and Accountability Reporting: Strategies for Reporting Under NCLB-Part II**

Friday, April 15, 10:35-12:05, Le Centre Sheraton Montreal/Salon A

Presenters:

- Rolf Blank – Council of Chief State School Officers, Chair
- Becky Kemna – Missouri Department of Education
- Pat Roschewski – Nebraska Department of Education
- Yi Du – Data Recognition Corporation - Discussant
- Arie J. van der Ploeg – Learning Point Associates - Discussant

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**A Special Thanks to Reviewers**

**By Barbara Clements**

I would like to thank all the people who served as reviewers for the papers submitted to our SIG. We appreciate their timely review of the papers and efficient use of the online submission and evaluation system. Thanks for a job well done.

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