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Dear Colleague:

I would like to take this opportunity to report on various activities occurring at the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in recent years that bear on interests of the library community.

NCES is the statistics arm of the Office for Educational Research and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education. The Center is required to collect and report full and complete statistics on the condition of education in the United States.

In April 1988, President Reagan signed into law P.L. 100-297, the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988. For the first time, this statute included a specific reference to libraries in the data collection mandate of NCES. Thus statistics related to public, academic, school, and special libraries will be included in the operational plans of the Center. NCES has statistical programs, now, for public, school, and academic libraries. In the future, we will explore approaches to collection of data from special libraries.

The Hawkins-Stafford law also added representation of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) to the NCES Advisory Council on Education Statistics. The Council has responsibility for overseeing the work of the Center and setting standards that will ensure technically sound data, not subject to political influence. Sue Martin, the Executive Director of NCLIS, is their representative on our Advisory Council.

Public Libraries

In the spring of 1988, NCES and NCLIS established a Task Force to develop an Action Plan for a Federal-State Cooperative System for Public Library Data (FSCS) as called for by P.L. 100-297. The FSCS Task Force was composed of representatives of national and State organizations with strong interest in producing accurate, reliable, annual State and national data. The Action Plan describes in detail the operations of the system, including the data items to be collected, definitions, analysis and publication of the results.

The Task Force also designed statistical tables for the system. The tables provide basic statistics for the number of service outlets, number of employees, library income, operating expenditures, size of collections, service hours, services, circulation, and number of interlibrary loans. All of these items will be presented both by State and by population of the library service area.
In the summer of 1988, we requested that the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies name a State data coordinator who would:

1. coordinate collection and annual reporting of the 41 data elements included in the new cooperative system (FSCS), and monitor the data collection from local libraries;

2. serve as a liaison with NCES; and

3. serve as a member of a network of data coordinators from the 50 States and the District of Columbia.

All 50 states and the District of Columbia named a coordinator. NCES sponsored a training workshop for the coordinators in Annapolis, Maryland last December to acquaint the participants with FSCS. Our second annual workshop is scheduled for December 3 - 6, in Phoenix, Arizona.

One of the recommendations from the Annapolis workshop was to establish a technical committee composed of State personnel who would work with NCES to improve the reporting and quality of data the States submit to the Center. This has facilitated compilation of the survey results rapidly after the close of the collection cycle and the Center will release these new statistics in November for 44 States and the District of Columbia. The remaining 6 States have indicated they will participate in the system next year.

We have also benefitted from another aid to rapid and accurate data processing. The Technical Committee working with NCES staff developed a program for use on a personal computer that can best be described as a state-of-the-art approach to data collection. The new program, titled "DECTOP", which stands for "Data Entry Conversion; Table Output Program," could be a model for any system that depends on administrative records as the data source. DECTOP performs the following functions:

1. Allow States to use their existing administrative files and computer language to report to NCES. The States simply extract the requested items from their files and arrange the data in the FSCS prescribed format.

2. The States then input their data through "DECTOP" in any of three languages, LOTUS 1-2-3, dBASE/FOXBASE, or a flat file (ASCII). DECTOP, in the conversion process, will edit for errors and items that appear to be out of range of normal expectations. The computer will produce a hard copy listing of the reporting units with problems and the nature of the problems, thus allowing the State to correct problems before these data are actually sent to NCES.

3. After the data have been corrected the State can produce the same tables that will be published by NCES, thus allowing the State to review the results prior to data submission. If State staff believe that a correction is necessary, it is a rather simple process to correct. When the data are complete, the State uses "DECTOP" to prepare a floppy disk for transmission to NCES.
The Task Force has also developed two publications: 1. "An Action Plan For A Federal-State Cooperative System For Public Library Data", which has been distributed to State library agencies, schools of library and information science, depository libraries, and the library press; and 2. a brochure entitled "Wanted-Facts about public libraries", which was distributed at the annual meeting of the American Library Association in Dallas, Texas (see copy attached). In addition, enough copies have been sent to each State library agency for them to distribute to each of the public libraries in their States.

The Action Plan calls for the development of a universe or "authority" file to control the State data submissions to FSCS. In response to this requirement, the Technical Committee together with NCES staff has developed a PC based reporting system similar to DECTOP for the States to use. This new system is called "PULS" (Public Library Universe System) and it will edit, summarize for each system, and tabulate the results. The 50 State data coordinators plus the coordinator for the District of Columbia will be trained in the use of the new system at the Phoenix, Arizona workshop. The States will use the system for submitting data this March.

School Library Media Centers

Six national studies of public school libraries have been completed by the Department of Education over the last four decades. They were conducted in 1950, 1953, 1958, 1962, 1974, and 1985. Currently, we are developing a school library media center statistical program that will be included as a component of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). The SASS is a State-by-State sample survey of elementary and secondary schools. It also includes a sample of private schools that will provide regional and national data. The survey collects data from four levels of school administration: school district, school, school administrator, and the teacher.

The SASS will be conducting a pretest in spring of 1990. We have added school library media center and specialist questions to each of the several data collection forms. Over the next year NCES will be developing two separate survey forms: 1. a school library media form that will gather data on total staff, collections, services and activities; and 2. a school library media specialist form that will collect data on the individual's background, experience, activities, and attitudes. When data are analyzed from the various forms, it will be possible to examine the relationships that exist between characteristics of the school district, school, principal, and teachers and the school library media programs present in schools. An example, might be the relationship of the principals' attitude toward the school library media center's role in the education process and the type of school library media center program that exists in the school. It will also be possible to examine the teachers' attitudes toward the library media center and the type of services the center offers.

The library media center program will provide data at the national, regional, and State levels. Public/private school comparisons can only be made at the national and regional levels. In all the large States, we expect to be able to present data comparing elementary and secondary education library media centers.
Data are expected to be analyzed by the following variables: SES level of the school, racial composition of the school, and by inner city, suburban, and rural settings.

Academic Libraries

College and university library data are collected as a component of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The most recent collection was included in the 1988-89 IPEDS surveys. We have begun to edit the data and plan to make data available to the general public in the winter of 1989/90.

We are pleased that we have been able to secure approval by the Office of Management and Budget for the collection of academic library data on a 2-year cycle rather than on a 4-year cycle. As a result, the next data collection effort will be conducted for academic year 1990-91.

For this next collection, we will take steps to increase the involvement of the academic library associations in the collection and follow up phases of the survey. In this regard, we have contacted the statistics committee of the Association of College and Research Libraries which has agreed to work with the State Higher Education Data Coordinators in assuring prompt response to the library survey of IPEDS. We are also thinking about developing some computer software for academic libraries similar to the DCTOP system described above, which will allow for personal computer processing of the survey results. Both of these steps, we believe, will substantially reduce the time between collection and publication.

Summary

The Center is pleased with the substantial progress over the past 2 years in building a credible library statistics program. This progress is largely due to the assistance, cooperation, and encouragement of many individuals and organizations in the library community and Anne Mathews and the staff of the Library Programs Office here in OERI. In addition, the Task Force, the Technical Committee and the State data coordinators, to name a few, have been instrumental in our accomplishments.

We look forward to your continued support. If you have any questions or suggestions, please feel free to call Larry La Moure (202-357-6642), Sam Peng (202-357-6354) or me (202-357-6828).

Sincerely,

Emerson J. Elliott
Acting Commissioner
of Education Statistics