

# NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

*Volume I*

*2013-14 and 2014-15 School-Level Finance Survey (SLFS:2014 & SLFS:2015) Pilot Study*

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## 1. Submittal Related Information

This material is being submitted under the generic National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) clearance agreement (OMB #1850-0803), which provides for NCES to conduct various procedures (e.g., exploratory, cognitive, usability, or follow-up interviews; focus groups; feasibility studies; pilot tests) to develop, test, and improve its data collection instruments and methodologies.

## 2. Background and Study Rationale

There is a significant demand for finance data at the school level. Policymakers, researchers, and the public have voiced concerns about the equitable distribution of school funding within and across school districts. The Department of Education emphasizes equity in the most recent budget proposed by the administration. The proposed reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Blueprint for Reform states that “Over time, districts will be required to ensure that their high-poverty schools receive state and local funding levels (for personnel and relevant non-personnel expenditures) comparable to those received by their low-poverty schools.” Proposed legislation would require that these data be used to demonstrate compliance with the Title I comparability provision.

The challenge for NCES as a statistical organization is to inform the conversation about equity by providing objective and comparable data that can be used to measure differences among schools and districts based on the demographic characteristics of those schools and districts. School-level finance data have been identified as one way of measuring how school-level education resources are distributed across and within school districts and examining the funding distributions across population characteristics (e.g. race/ethnicity make-up, poverty level, urban/rural, etc.) of those districts and schools.

In spring of 2014, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development (OPEPD) requested that NCES design a school-level finance collection. Although the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) mandated for states to report school level expenditures per pupil for the 2008–09 school year and four school-level finance data items were added to the biennial Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) starting with the 2009-10 school year, a comprehensive school-level finance data collection has not been established on annual basis. The objective is to design a school-level collection that leverages the existing expertise and infrastructure developed by NCES and Census Bureau analysts by virtue of their administration of the National Public Education Financial Survey (NPEFS) and the School District Finance Survey (F-33). Another key asset that NCES and Census bring to the table is our ability to work closely with our respondents, the state fiscal coordinators. As stated in the Statement of Commitment to Scientific Integrity adopted by the principal statistical agencies, “a Federal agency must have the trust of those whose information it obtains.”

The School-Level Finance Survey (SLFS), which is essentially an expansion of the F-33 survey to include some variables at the school level, will centrally collect school-level finance data from state education agencies (SEAs). In the first year of the pilot we expect 9-15 SEAs to participate and in the second year potentially up to 20.

This school-level finance collection is a collaborative effort between NCES and the Census Bureau, with the Census Bureau carrying out the data collection for NCES. NCES and Census have jointly conducted the school district-level F-33 survey and state-level NPEFS survey for over 20 years. Collaboration on the school-level finance survey by NCES and Census Bureau staff will further enhance efficiency and promote consistency across all three finance surveys.

The first year of the pilot data collection will commence within a few days of obtaining OMB clearance, and the

second year of data collection will commence on March 15, 2016. In 2015, data will be collected for the 2013-14 school year (fiscal year 2014) and, in 2016, for the 2014-15 school year (fiscal year 2015). This request is for two years of data collection as part of the SLFS Pilot, in 2015 and 2016, because analyses of the first year data will not be yet completed by the time the second year of data collection will need to begin, and the second year will provide a chance for the SEAs, NCES, and Census to fine-tune the data collection and processing procedures.

### **Recent Department of Education School-Level Finance Data Collections**

ARRA 2009 required states to report a school-by-school listing of per-pupil education expenditures for the 2008–09 school year, for each school district that received Title I, Part A, ARRA funds. Data collection was completed in 2010, and a final report and dataset were released in November 2011. Approximately 96% of regular schools receiving Title I funds reported data. The four finance data items collected by OPEPD are listed below:

- Personnel salaries at the school level for all school-level instructional and support staff, based on the Census Bureau’s classification used in the School District Finance Survey (F-33).
- Personnel salaries at the school level for instructional staff only.
- Personnel salaries at the school level for teachers only.
- Non-personnel expenditures at the school level.

The Office for Civil Rights added similar school-level finance data items to CRDC beginning in SY 2009-10. Data collections for SY 2009-10 and SY 2011-12 are completed, and the SY 2013-14 data collection is currently underway. One of the goals of the SLFS 2014 portion of the Pilot is to compare the school finance data received through SLFS with those received through the CRDC 2013-14. For this reason, to minimize any differences that may be due to differences in reporting time, it is important to collect the SLFS 2014 data in the spring 2015. CRDC is a biennial collection, so not collecting SLFS 2014 now would mean that the next opportunity for this comparison would not be possible until two years from now.

**Feasibility Study by OPEPD:** OPEPD is currently conducting the Feasibility Study on Improving the Quality of School-Level Expenditure Data that examines the options for improving the consistency and completeness of school-level expenditure data, including the types of expenditures that would be most appropriate to include for the purpose of assessing equity, as well as technical and operational challenges for including certain types of expenditures. The study also examines the experiences of states and districts that currently track school-level expenditures, including variations in definitions and practices used in their jurisdictions, the types of changes to accounting systems and practices that are required, and the potential cost of implementing such changes. This feasibility study is exploring options for improving the completeness, consistency, and accuracy of school-level expenditure reporting. The results will become available in late spring of 2015 and will be used to inform the pilot SLFS.

### **3. Purpose**

The primary purpose of the pilot SLFS is to test the feasibility of collecting school level finance data in conjunction with the existing LEA- and SEA-level finance surveys. The pilot SLFS will evaluate the collection method to determine if it is a viable, efficient, and cost effective method to gather school-level finance data and whether this method provides higher quality data than the previously used methods of collecting these data.

The results of the pilot school-level finance collection will be published as part of the Research and Development (R&D) series of reports at NCES.<sup>1</sup> The resulting R&D report will provide an overview of the SLFS collection, a

<sup>1</sup> The R&D series of reports at NCES has been initiated to:

- Share studies and research that are developmental in nature. The results of such studies may be revised as the work continues and additional data become available;

comparison of SLFS data with other sources of school-level finance data, a discussion of SLFS respondents' ability to report survey data items, determination of the capacity of different types of schools to report such data to their SEA, SEA and LEA respondent burden, and general advantages and limitations of collecting finance data at the school level. The R&D report will also examine data quality issues such as the ability of SEAs to utilize the pilot data collection instrument, the ability of SEAs and the Census Bureau to "crosswalk" school-level finance data from state education agency format to SLFS survey variables, data anomalies, and the application of edit procedures. NCEC is cognizant that a few school-level finance data item definitions may need to be revised for future collections in an effort to make future state-reported school-level finance data more comparable across districts and between schools within districts.

NCEC and the Census Bureau propose to define "school-level expenditures" using expenditure classifications that are already used in existing NCEC fiscal data collections at the state and district levels. NCEC will not request school-level expenditure data for functions that are commonly accounted for at the district-level, such as student transportation and food services expenditures.

#### 4. Design

Respondents for the pilot survey will include up to 15 SEAs in the first year and up to 20 SEAs in the second year from which the school-level finance data will be collected. Participation is voluntary. In order to explore the range of issues school-level finance data collection from all states may entail, attempt will be made to stratify respondents across the spectrum of difficulty in providing school-level finance data. The state respondents for the data collection will be chosen from among states that have had:

- 1) high levels of success collecting school-level finance data (e.g., State Finance Reporting System and Uniform Chart of Accounts adequately report school level expenditures for the following categories: personnel compensation, purchased professional and technical services, and supplies);
- 2) moderate levels of success in collecting school-level finance data (e.g., the state does not necessarily require accounting for expenditures at the school level; however, many schools (often schools in medium to large school districts or schools in cities with relatively large populations) are able to adequately account for school-level expenditures for at least some of the following categories: personnel compensation, purchased professional and technical services, and supplies);
- 3) relatively low levels of success in collecting school-level finance data (e.g., the state currently does not have uniform accounting guidelines for school-level reporting; it would take significant changes to the current State Finance Reporting System and Uniform Chart of Accounts to adequately report school-level expenditures).

The respondents will also be purposively selected to include states with large, small, and a mixture of large and small districts, geographic diversity, and reflect varying data quality levels in response to previous school-level finance collections. NCEC analyzed school level finance data submitted in response to the ARRA and CRDC collections in comparison with F-33 survey data to ascertain various data quality levels. For the most part, the states that will be selected for the initial SLFS pilot are expected not to overlap with those included in the Feasibility Study on Improving the Quality of School-Level Expenditure Data.

SEAs will be encouraged to submit electronic data files to the Census Bureau via secure file transfer protocol (FTP)

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- Share the results of studies that are, to some extent, the "cutting edge" of methodological developments. Emerging analytical approaches and new computer software development often permit new and sometimes controversial analyses to be done. By participating in "frontier research," we hope to contribute to the resolution of issues and improved analysis; and
  - Participate in discussions of emerging issues of interest to education researchers, statisticians, and the federal statistical community in general. Such reports may document workshops and symposia sponsored by NCEC that address methodological and analytical issues or may share and discuss issues regarding NCEC practices, procedures, and standards.

upload, utilizing the same method in which F-33 survey files are submitted. However, to minimize the burden placed on respondents, the Census Bureau will accept data in a format similar to the F-33 survey or a format preferred by each SEA. The F-33 SLFS format for data submission conforms with *Financial Accounting for Local and State School Systems: 2014 Edition* (Allison, 2015) – the NCES handbook that provides guidance to SEAs and LEAs in establishing and maintaining their school financial accounting systems. The function and object codes for all variables in the SLFS are defined in the NCES Accounting Handbook and cross referenced in the data collection instrument. In order to minimize burden on participating SEAs, Census will work with those SEAs that submit SLFS data using a format other than the F-33 in order to create a crosswalk between the data they submit and each SLFS variable and to assure that the resulting data conform to the NCES Accounting Handbook. Additionally, NCES and Census Bureau analysts have extensive experience training SEA respondents on reporting state and district-level finance data<sup>2</sup>, and will leverage this expertise to conduct webinars on reporting the same finance data at the school-level.

NCES will leverage the expertise of Census Bureau analysts that are currently operating the processing systems for the NPEFS and the F-33 surveys, including the use of Census’s Local Education Agency Finance System (LEAFS) processing application that processes school district-level finance data. Many current school district finance edits and processing procedures will be applicable to school-level finance data. Modifications will be made to the current system to add capability to process finance data at the school level. Additionally, the LEAFS system gives survey staff the ability to compare data across the state, district, and school levels. Having the capability to cross-check school-level finance data at the school, district, and state levels will help to detect data errors and ensure data consistency across the surveys. Additionally, the LEAFS’s capability to cross-check data at the district and state levels will also facilitate understanding of how different models of LEA organizations affect school-level finance collections.

The pilot data collection will be hosted on U.S. Department of Education servers. In order to assess the quality and completeness of the data, NCES will conduct analyses of data on schools, teachers, instructional aide salaries, and teacher salaries collected during the SLFS pilot as compared to data collected by the F-33 survey, the CRDC, the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), NPEFS, and other applicable non-fiscal surveys. NCES will conduct verification and editing of the SLFS data in an iterative and interactive process that will include procedures for detecting and correcting errors in the data (NCES 2014). The SLFS survey analysts will request state fiscal coordinators to correct or confirm numbers that appear out of range. If an SEA does not provide a correction or reasonable explanation for anomalous data, the SLFS survey analysts will correct the data based on a defined set of business rules or in some cases suppress data that do not meet quality standards and cannot be corrected.

### *Recruitment*

NCES and the Census Bureau SEAs will recruit SEAs for the SLFS Pilot (see Attachment A) and anticipate contacting up to 20 SEAs in the first year and up to 27 SEAs in the second year. It is anticipated that many of the SEAs that will participate in the first year will also participate in the second year. The recruitment process is expected to take approximately 60 minutes per entity. The individual responsible at each SEA for fiscal data collection and entry will be recruited to participate in the study. Recruitment communications with each SEA will describe the purpose of the study, including that the data will be used for testing purposes only; indicate the voluntary nature and importance of participation and the estimated burden on the SEA staff.

### *Supporting Documents in this Submission*

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<sup>2</sup> For over 20 years, every July, NCES and Census have jointly conducted annual training sessions for all SEAs at the NCES Summer Data Conference and, every spring, a separate training session at NCES headquarters for new SEA fiscal data collection respondents on how to report school finance data for the NPEFS and F-33 surveys.

Attachment A – SLFS Pilot Recruitment and Announcement Letters: The recruitment letter will be used for the initial contact with the SEAs to invite them to participate in the survey. The announcement letter will be mailed electronically to respondents at the beginning of each survey period, officially announcing the opening of the collection period and requesting information on estimated date of submission and updated contact information for the state coordinator. Census Bureau staff will use responses to this letter to plan for the processing of SEA data submissions.

Attachment B – SLFS Pilot Form with Instructions: The F-33 SLFS 2014 data collection instrument includes a form with the school-level education finance data items to be collected, instructions, and exclusions. In practice, this form will serve more as a data reporting guide for respondents rather than as a data collection instrument per se, given that SEAs find it less burdensome to submit data in an electronic file format. As part of the district-level F-33 collection, all states provide significant amounts of public school system finance data to the Census Bureau via the Internet using File Transfer Protocol (FTP). For the SLFS Pilot, SEAs will be able to report data to the Census Bureau using either the Attachment B survey form categories or the SEA’s financial accounting format.

Attachment C – SLFS Pilot Data Plan Survey: The survey asks questions related to the data items, data availability, capacity of SEAs to produce the school-level finance data, and the time it took to complete the F-33 SLFS data request. The results of this survey will be used to match future data items on the SLFS with the data that the SEAs can actually provide, and to improve future data collection materials and processes to increase data quality and minimize burden on respondents.

## 5. Consultations outside the Agency

In January 2014, NCES participated in an expert panel convened by OPEPD for the Feasibility Study on Improving the Quality of School-Level Expenditure Data, which focused on the availability of data, data quality, data elements, and proposed data item definitions. The proposed general design and content for the FY 14 collection was based on the F-33 collection, OMB’s request, and the work of OPEPD on this topic. It was presented to policymakers, researchers, state fiscal coordinators, and the public in March and July of 2014 at the American Education Finance and Policy Association conference and the NCES Summer Data Conference. NCES will continue to solicit feedback on the design and content of SLFS during webinars that will be provided to participating states.

## 6. Payments to Respondents

Respondents will not receive payments for this collection.

## 7. Assurance of Confidentiality

The data collected in this survey are from public records and do not require a pledge of confidentiality. We cite this confidentiality statement and the voluntary nature of this data collection in the Announcement letter. The following PRA statement is included on the F-33 SLFS Pilot Form and Instructions (Attachment B):

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), within the U.S. Department of Education, is authorized to conduct this study by the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA 2002; 20 U.S.C. § 9543). The U.S. Census Bureau is administering this survey on behalf of NCES. This study has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this voluntary survey is 1850–0803. The time required to complete this survey is estimated to average 45-130 hours per response, including the time to review instructions, gather the data needed, and complete and review the survey. If you have any comments concerning the accuracy of the time estimate, suggestions for improving this survey, or any comments or concerns regarding the status of

your individual submission of this survey, please write to: School-Level Finance Survey (SLFS), National Center for Education Statistics, 1990 K Street, NW, 9<sup>th</sup> floor, Washington, DC 20006-5650.

## 8. Estimate of Hour Burden

NCES and the Census Bureau discussed with SEAs interested in participating in the pilot project the likely reporting burden of this collection. Based on the F-33 existing survey, Census estimated that it will take each SEA on average 125 hours to provide data in the F-33 SLFS format, and based on conversations with the interested SEAs, Census estimated that it will take an SEA approximately 42 hours to submit data in their own state-specific format. The burden to complete the data plan survey is estimated at 2.5 hours. Table 1 shows the estimated burden to respondents for participating in the SLFS 2014 and 2015 Pilot.

Table 1. School Level Finance Survey 2014 and 2015 Pilot Estimated Respondent Burden

Submission Method or Form Type	Maximum Number of Respondents	Maximum Number of Responses	Hours Per Respondent	Maximum Total Burden Hours
SLFS 2014 portion of the Pilot (in 2015)				
SEA Recruitment	20	20	1	20
Survey Announcement	15	15	0.25	4
SLFS 2014 Webinar	15	15	2	30
Form F-33-SLFS Instructions	15	15	0.25	4
Data Submission using F-33 Format	5	5	125	625
Data Submission using SEA's Format	10	10	42	420
SLFS 2014 Data Plan Survey	15	15	2.5	38
<i>SLFS 2014 total</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>95</i>	<i>--</i>	<i>1,141</i>
SLFS 2015 portion of the Pilot (in 2016)				
SEA Recruitment	27	27	1	27
Survey Announcement	20	20	0.25	5
SLFS 2015 Webinar	20	20	2	40
Form F-33-SLFS Instructions	20	20	0.25	5
Data Submission using F-33 Format	7	7	125	875
Data Submission using SEA's Format	13	13	42	546
SLFS 2015 Data Plan Survey	20	20	2.5	50
<i>SLFS 2015 total</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>127</i>	<i>--</i>	<i>1,548</i>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>2,689</b>

Assuming the estimated average hourly rate of \$24.53 for SEA and local government employees<sup>3</sup>, the 2,689 burden hours result in burden cost to respondents of approximately \$65,962.

Respondents are not expected to incur any costs other than their time to respond. The information requested is of the type and scope normally included in government records and no special hardware or accounting software or system is necessary to provide answers to this information collection. Further, purchasing of outside accounting, or information collection services, if performed by the respondent, is part of customary business practices and not specifically required for this information collection.

## 9. Cost to Federal Government

The estimated cost to the federal government for Fiscal Year 2015 is approximately \$892,243. This amount includes \$420,000 for the Census Bureau for data collection activities; \$97,243 for American Institutes for

<sup>3</sup> Based on the 2013 Annual Survey of Public Employment and Payroll for the education-elementary and secondary total function, and calculated by dividing the total monthly payroll for full time state and local government employees by the number of full-time employees and converted to an hourly rate assuming an average forty-hour week. US Census Bureau website accessed April 20, 2015: <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.



Research (AIR) to independently review the data; and \$250,000 for U.S. Department of Education statisticians to oversee the data collection and reporting. The costs are expected to be similar for Fiscal Year 2016.

## 10. Reporting Plans

The results of the SLFS 2014 and 2015 Pilot will be published as part of the NCES Research and Development (R&D) series of reports, with documentation also produced. NCES will make a research and development data file available for external data users. Such data users are subject to an NCES data use agreement that specifically covers the SLFS pilot data. In order to proceed to the SLFS pilot data files, the data user(s) must signify their agreement to comply with the provisions in the data usage agreement set forth below. The NCES Data Usage Agreement for the SLFS Pilot Data states:

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### **NCES Data Usage Agreement for School-Level Finance Survey (SLFS) Pilot Data:**

The SLFS pilot data present results that do not reach definitive conclusions because the data are tentative, and the methodology is new and developing. As such, NCES does not consider SLFS pilot data to be ready to be used for official statistics nor policy or program decisions at the federal, state, or local level. Therefore, the techniques and inferences made from SLFS data are tentative and subject to revision

The SLFS pilot data can only be used for the express purpose of research and development activities. Users shall:

- Use the data in the SLFS dataset for research and development activities only.
- Make no use of the identity of any person discovered inadvertently, and advise NCES of any such discovery.
- Not link any dataset with individually identifiable data from other NCES or non-NCES datasets.

Any effort to determine the identity of any reported case by public-use data users is prohibited by law. Violations are subject to Class E felony charges of a fine up to \$250,000 and/or a prison term up to 5 years.

NCES does all it can to assure that the identity of data subjects cannot be disclosed. All direct identifiers, as well as any characteristics that might lead to identification, are omitted or modified in the dataset to protect the true characteristics of individual cases. Any intentional identification or disclosure of a person violates the assurances of confidentiality given to the providers of the information.

To proceed you must signify your agreement to comply with the above-stated requirements by clicking the box below that states I agree. Doing so will close this window, and allow you to proceed to download the research and development pilot data set.

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The research and development purposes for the SLFS pilot include but are not limited to replicating the NCES research and development analysis, analyzing data quality issues, comparing SLFS data with other sources of school-level finance data, and evaluating data availability across all schools in the participating SEAs.

To facilitate the process of closure on the SLFS pilot data collection issues, NCES invites comment, criticism, and alternatives to what the agency has done. Such responses should be directed to:

Marilyn Seastrom  
Chief Statistician  
Statistical Standards Program  
National Center for Education Statistics Institute of Education Sciences  
1990 K Street, NW Washington, DC 20006-5651

## 11. Project Schedule

Table 2a below shows the project schedule for the SLFS 2014 portion of the Pilot and table 2b for the SLFS 2015 portion of the Pilot.

Table 2a. SLFS FY 2014 Pilot Timetable

<b>Data Collection</b>	
Data item definitions	October 30, 2014
Data collection materials development	November 14, 2014
Add school-level capacity to F-33 LEAFS processing system	December, 15, 2014
SLFS 2014 data collection opens	Few days upon OMB approval
Editing and processing of data	May-December 2015
Independent review of data	May-December 2015
SEAs respond to data issues uncovered in independent reviews	June-December, 2015
Complete FY 14 data collection	December 31, 2015
<b>Analysis Plan</b>	
Draft Analysis Plan	September 15, 2015
Revised Analysis Plan	November 15, 2015
Preliminary data tabulations	March 31, 2016
Revised data tabulations	April 30, 2016
Data tabulations for R&D report	May 14, 2016
<b>Documentation</b>	
Draft documentation	November 15, 2016
<b>R&amp;D Report</b>	
First draft of R&D report	April 2016
Publish R&D report	August 2016

Table 2b. SLFS FY 2015 Pilot Timetable

<b>Data Collection</b>	
SLFS 2015 data collection opens	March 15, 2016
Editing and processing of data	March-December 2016
Independent review of data	March-December 2016
SEAs respond to data issues uncovered in independent reviews	April-December, 2016
Complete FY 15 data collection	December 31, 2016
<b>Analysis Plan</b>	
Draft Analysis Plan	September 15, 2016
Revised Analysis Plan	November 15, 2016
Preliminary data tabulations	January 31, 2017
Revised data tabulations	March 15, 2017
Data tabulations for R&D report	April 10, 2017
<b>Documentation</b>	
Draft documentation	September 15, 2017
<b>R&amp;D Report</b>	
First draft of R&D report	February 2017
Publish R&D report	June 2017

**Attachment A – SLFS Pilot Recruitment and Announcement Letters**  
**Recruitment Letter**



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
**INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES**

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

[date upon OMB approval], 2015

Name  
Fiscal Coordinator  
State \_\_ Department of Education  
City, State, Zip code

Dear Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

In response to significant demand for finance data at the school level, NCES is developing a new school-level finance survey (SLFS) on a pilot basis. Policymakers, researchers, and the public have voiced concerns about the distribution of school funding within school districts. These data can be used to examine how school-level education resources are distributed across and within districts. This pilot SLFS collection is essentially an expansion of the School District Finance Survey (commonly called the F-33) to include some variables at the school level. State education agencies (SEAs) are the survey respondents.

[State] is cordially invited to participate in the pilot SLFS collection. Up to fourteen other SEAs will also be asked to participate in the first year of this pilot project.

The pilot SLFS will commence on [date] 2015, collecting data for the 2013-14 school year (fiscal year 2014). SLFS is a collaborative effort between NCES and the Census Bureau, with the Census Bureau administering the data collection.

The primary purpose of the SLFS Pilot is to assess the advantages and potential limitations inherent in collecting school-level finance data and to document how SEAs, NCES, and the Census Bureau respond to these limitations.

This pilot school-level finance collection is part of the Research and Development (R&D) series of studies at NCES. The resulting R&D report will provide an overview of the SLFS collection, a comparison of SLFS data with other sources of school-level finance data, a discussion of SLFS respondents' ability to report survey data items, determination of the capacity of different types of schools to report such data to their SEA, SEA and LEA respondent burden, and general advantages and limitations of collecting finance data at the school level. The R&D report will also examine data quality issues such as the ability of SEAs to utilize the pilot data collection instrument, the ability of SEAs and the Census Bureau to "crosswalk" school-level finance data from state education agency format to SLFS survey variables, data anomalies, and the application of edit procedures.

NCES and the Census Bureau have finalized the data collection instrument, instructions, and data plan for the first year of the SLFS Pilot based on your feedback and comments during the 2014 NCES Summer Data Conference.

Please kindly notify me of your intentions regarding participation in the pilot SLFS by [date], 2015. If you have any questions or concerns, I can be reached via e-mail at [stephen.cornman@ed.gov](mailto:stephen.cornman@ed.gov) or by phone at (202) 502-7338. I appreciate your time and attention in this new endeavor.

Sincerely,

Stephen Q. Cornman  
Project Director  
National Public Education Financial Survey &  
School District Finance Survey

c: Ross Santy  
Challis Breithaupt  
David Gromos  
Osei Ampadu  
Stephen Wheeler

## Announcement Letter

[within a week of OMB approval], 2015

Dear Fiscal Coordinator:

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the U.S. Census Bureau would like to thank you for your participation in the FY 2014 School-Level Finance Survey (SLFS) Pilot. Policymakers, researchers, and the public have voiced concerns about the distribution of school funding within elementary-secondary school districts. This survey will provide a new source of data for examining the extent to which school-level education resources are distributed across and within school districts. Your assistance enables us to collect and report school-level education finance information that will be valuable to a variety of data users. Please be aware that public records retained from this collection do not require confidentiality. The purpose of this letter is to officially announce the opening of the collection for the FY 2014 pilot survey.

I have enclosed the FY 2014 survey form and the materials you need to participate, which will assist you with your data submission. If you need additional information or have questions about any of the data items, please feel free to contact me or the SLFS staff at the Census Bureau at (800) 437-4196 or [erd.f33.list@census.gov](mailto:erd.f33.list@census.gov).

We look forward to working with your state on this pilot survey. The success of this voluntary collection will be due to your cooperation, and we greatly appreciate your efforts.

Sincerely,

Stephen Q. Cornman, Project Director  
School-Level Finance Survey Pilot  
National Center for Education Statistics  
U.S. Department of Education  
[Stephen.Cornman@ed.gov](mailto:Stephen.Cornman@ed.gov)  
(202) 502-7338