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Online Loan Counseling Workgroup Proposes
XML Standard as Education Community Standard
Public Comment Period Now Open

January 25, 2007 (Washington DC) ~ The Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council (PESC) is pleased to announce that the Online Loan Counseling Workgroup of the Standards Forum for Education has proposed its Online Loan Counseling XML Schema as an approved and recognized education community standard.

Loan counseling is required under the Higher Education Act of 1965 for all students receiving federal student aid. Counseling is administered by an institution (or the institution’s service provider) and occurs twice, when the student initially receives aid (called “entrance counseling”) and then before the student graduates (called “exit counseling”). With advancements in technology, counseling can be conducted online and a number of service providers provide online loan counseling products to institutions and borrowers. Currently, these providers use proprietary file layouts. Institutions, guarantors, lenders, servicers, and others retrieve or receive loan counseling records from these service providers. If these entities are using multiple providers though, identification and matching of data elements and records and data integrity in general become significant challenges. In addition, the ability to upload files to financial aid management system (FAMS) is complicated, as the layouts don’t follow industry standards.

“The higher education community will truly benefit from online loan counseling data exchange standards,” states CariAnne Behr of Mapping Your Future and Chair of the Online Loan Counseling Workgroup. “Entities receiving counseling data will be able to identify elements, regardless of the loan counseling provider. These same entities will be able to more easily upload data into their systems.”

The Workgroup is comprised of a wide range of representatives from guarantors, lenders, servicers, Mapping Your Future, the National Council of Higher Education Loan Programs (NCHELP), and the US Department of Education’s Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA).

With the development work completed and submitted on October 20, 2006, XML Online Loan Counseling is now immediately ready for public comment period. The complete submission can be accessed at http://www.PESC.org/Workgroups/OnlineLoan/. The public comment period begins Thursday January 25, 2006 and will be thirty (30) calendar days. Public comment period expires at
the close of business on Thursday March 8, 2007. All comments, from the PESC Membership and the public, shall be made in the form of an e-mail to the PESC Executive Director at: Sessa@PESC.org. The comment e-mail should clearly identify the:

1) Responder name and appropriate contact information;
2) Source of the comments, i.e., whether the comments are individual or represent those of a group the responder represents;
3) Nature of the responder’s interest in the standard (what is the issue and why is it important?);
4) Element(s) of the proposed standard with which issue is taken;
5) Changes suggested to resolve the issue(s).

The Implementation Guide, Instance Document, Schema, and corresponding version of Core Main are all posted on the PESC website at http://www.PESC.org/Workgroups/OnlineLoan/.

The Process

Within 30 calendar days after the close of the public comment period, the Change Control Board (CCB) of the Standards Forum for Education will address and consider all public comments and make, in consultation with the Online Loan Counseling Workgroup any necessary revisions. All public comments will be posted to the PESC website during the review process. The CCB’s consideration/revision period expires on Thursday April 19, 2007 unless extenuating circumstances exist which require further deliberation.

Once any changes resulting from the public comment period have been incorporated, the CCB will recommend to the Standards Forum’s Steering Committee and the PESC Board of Directors that the Specification be submitted to a vote by the PESC Members. The Board will have seven (7) calendar days to approve the submission or refer it back to the CCB with specific instructions for further work. The PESC office will issue electronic ballots to the official contacts of voting Member organizations.

Completed ballots, including the reason(s) for any rejection, shall be returned to the PESC office via e-mail attachment, fax, overnight delivery, or U.S. Postal Service within ten (10) business days. PESC staff is responsible for the tabulation of the ballots; acceptance of the Specification as a standard requires an affirmative vote of at least 80% of all votes cast. Once the Members accept the Specification, the Board of Directors will within seven (7) calendar days ratify the vote, publish/post all necessary documents and communications, and implement version control on all documents. Approved standards are freely accessible on the PESC website (www.PESC.org).

For more information, please visit www.PESC.org.

About PESC
Established in 1997 and located in Washington, D.C., the Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council (PESC) is a non-profit, community-based, umbrella association of colleges and universities; professional and commercial organizations; data, software and service providers; and state and federal government agencies. PESC’s mission is to lead the establishment and adoption of data exchange standards in education. The goals of the mission are to enable the improvement of institutional performance and foster collaboration across educational communities in order to lower costs, improve service, and attain system interoperability.