XML Transcript Released for Public Comment

PESC and AACRAO are pleased to announce the final draft release of the XML Postsecondary Transcript Schema for public comment. This effort is the result of many months of analysis, collaboration, and development between the XML Forum for Education, the SPEEDE Committee, and the ESC Committee.

This draft release of the XML Postsecondary Transcript Schema will be available for downloading on Monday, September 8, 2003 from www.StandardsCouncil.org. Public comments will be accepted through close of business Friday October 3, and should be submitted to: PESC, One Dupont Circle NW, Suite 520 Washington, DC 20036, ATTN: XML Postsecondary Transcript, or at Transcript@StandardsCouncil.org

When submitting public comments, please be sure to include a full description of the issue you are raising, cite appropriate page numbers and sections, a proposed solution to the issue you are raising, along with your name, company name, phone number, and email address.

Once all public comments are received, they will be compiled, addressed, and responded to by a review committee. The goal is to resolve all public comment issues in order to release the final version 1.0 by Friday, November 7, 2003.

As the community prepares for the release of the XML Postsecondary Transcript, we cannot discount the value and function of the existing standard for transcripts (in EDI), which is still largely used throughout the higher education community.

Organizations questioning whether to continue support and investment in EDI or begin investment in XML can only answer that question themselves. Who you trade with and what they are able to support will heavily influence what you support and which direction you take. Service providers and vendors must analyze and understand what is best for their clients as factors vary depending on how, when, and with whom data is to be exchanged.

Keep in mind though that how willing or able each school is to migrating to XML will vary dramatically from school to school. Moreover,
If a school uses a software vendor, then the choice to use XML in place of or side-by-side with EDI is to be made by the vendor as the data exchange formats, in most cases, are transparent to the school. And while EDI is used more in a batch environment, XML, which could also be batched, is really designed for real-time data exchanges. How quickly data is needed and when, will play a role in which standard is supported. Architects of the XML Postsecondary Transcript have attempted to maintain as much similarity as possible to the EDI Transcript in an effort to make migrating from EDI to XML easier.

Voluntary rules of support can be put into place by the communities and stakeholders involved. These rules usually involve or insinuate support for both the existing standard and the future standard.

For service providers and vendors launching new products and services, building two standards simultaneously may be a difficult pill to swallow or even impossible.

In these instances, an organization’s product development and prioritization process must be clean and efficient and must take into account when the product is to be launched and who would be most likely to use it. In-depth customer surveys on development and industry readiness will provide a good snapshot of your target market and depending on the results, may give you your answer. PESC is planning to track implementation of the XML Postsecondary Transcript within the community to facilitate understanding of who is using XML and when.

Efforts continue to solicit approval of the XML Transcript through the ANSI ASC X12 process. Final design rules for XML have not been reached within X12 and this pushes the projected approval of the XML Transcript to mid-2004 at best.

The decision to release the XML Transcript as an industry standard now was reached through joint discussion of all parties involved in order to provide the higher education community with an XML solution for the transcript as soon as possible. This way, a direction for the industry is provided in order to conduct business now, and the direction is on track with the X12 process.

All information will be made available through future editions of the Standard and available on PESC’s website, www.StandardsCouncil.org.
Please be advised that a meeting of the PESC Membership has been scheduled for Tuesday, October 21, 12:00 pm to 1:30 p.m. This meeting will be held in Austin, Texas at the Radisson Hotel and Suites immediately before PESC’s Technology Summit which kicks off on the same day at 1:30 pm.

We are communicating to you now to ensure you have enough time to plan and make appropriate travel arrangements. Tentatively scheduled for the agenda at this time is: Discussion and voting on impending bylaw changes; Elections for the XML Forum Steering Committee; Discussion on new services and benefits that are being offered to membership; and a review of PESC initiatives for the 2003-2004 membership year.

PESC is sponsoring a lunch buffet for this meeting. RSVP directly to alSayyed@StandardsCouncil.org.

As elections for the Steering Committee will be held, we are now accepting nominations for the Steering Committee, which is a five-member body that leads and provides oversight for the XML Forum for Education. Those interested in nominating or in serving should send the nominees name, title, organization, and a brief bio to the attention of Michael Sessa, PESC Executive Director, One Dupont Circle NW, Suite 520, Washington DC 20036. Email nominations can also be submitted to Sessa@StandardsCouncil.org. Nominations will be closed at the close of business on Tuesday, September 30, 2003. Note that representatives must be from organizations that are MEMBERS of PESC. The final agenda, along with ballots, proxies, and all supporting documentation will be finalized and issued on October 1, 2003.

We encourage all of PESC members and affiliates to attend, because Membership Meetings are your chance to influence the direction of your organization! If you have yet to register for the free Technology Summit in Austin, please visit www.StandardsCouncil.org. We look forward to seeing you in October!
Data Strategy at FSA

It's all about the data...and leaders within the US Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA), who understand that, have been quietly organizing efforts to develop a global strategy for how data is managed internally by FSA and exchanged with the thousands of schools and partners it has. Launched by Terri Shaw, FSA's COO; Jerry Schubert, FSA's CIO, Kay Jacks, FSA's General Manager of Application, School Eligibility, and Delivery; and Kristie Hansen, General Manager of Financial Partners Channel, FSA’s data strategy is founded on several key principles:

- Data should be organized by business process, not by system.
- Providing data access to business experts is a key component to improving the enterprise's ability to make informed business decisions.
- Centralized visibility and data flow control of the end-to-end interface process are needed.
- Using a matching algorithm with SS#, first name, last name, and DOB is the most flexible and tolerant method to identify customers.
- A single enterprise-wide solution for all trading partner identification and access is needed.

The FSA's Data Strategy initiative is comprised of 6 teams:

1. **Standard Student Identification Method (SSIM)** - This team, lead by Jean Saunders, seeks to establish a simple framework by which FSA and delivery partners can consistently identify students/borrowers across all phases of the Student Aid Lifecycle. This means that FSA will use the same matching criteria across all systems when exchanging data both internally and externally. The algorithm to be used to match data requires a combination of data fields common to all systems. The primary identifier is the SS#, but it will be verified through enterprise-wide business rules and tolerances with additional data fields: first name, last name, and DOB. Benefits of SSIM include improved data quality and data integrity, increased accuracy for changes and updates, and a more user-friendly approach to data operations within FSA.

SSIM's high level requirements include:
- consistently and systematically link customer records across the FSA enterprise
- support changes and updates to key customer attributes (e.g. updates to SS#, first name, last name, DOB)
- ensure student privacy protection: minimize unauthorized/unauthenticated access to student data
- system identification requirements should not prevent valid customers from receiving aid or progressing through the repayment phase (e.g. deferments, rehabilitations, consolidations)

2. **Routing ID (RID)** - This team, lead by Paul Hill, will provide FSA trading partners a means to interact with FSA systems and services using a single common identifier across the enterprise, irrespective of system or function. This will result in increased data quality, enhanced oversight capability, and simplify trading partner interactions with FSA. This means that for the same institution or campus FSA will use the same ID number across all programs (Pell, Campus-based, Direct Lending, etc.). The RID is a randomly generated, eight character numeric ID that will be "dumb," meaning the number signifies nothing about the trading partner except its identity. The OPEID will be maintained for an indefinite period while the DUNS number will remain required.

RID's high level requirements include:
- single common identifier
- enterprise solution for management of partners' identities
- minimize impact to established trading partner interactions through a gradual phase-in approach
- increase data quality of information maintained about FSA trading partners
3. **XML Framework** - This team, lead by Holly Hyland, seeks to migrate FSA to the use of XML via a single set of enterprise and community standards and to simplify and streamline data exchange across postsecondary education. This means that FSA is integrating XML as an enterprise-wide standard for internal and external data exchange, taking full advantage of XML’s position as the industry standard for data exchange.

FSA's "XML Framework Strategic Assessment and Enterprise Vision" document provides a detailed roadmap of the strategy and rationale behind the XML Framework. FSA's Enterprise XML Framework approach is presented in an Integration Partner developed model, called the XML Maturity Model. This model provides a sequencing plan for FSA to incrementally standardize and improve its usage of XML Across the enterprise. The activities and sequence are aligned with FSA’s key business objectives. The XML Maturity Model is based on previous XML development at FSA, XML case studies, general industry trends, and key principles from Carnegie Melon’s Software Engineering Institute (SEI) Capability Maturity Model (CMM). The resulting XML Maturity Model provides a phased approach to implementing XML as an enterprise standard within FSA. The model also provides a roadmap against which FSA can measure its progress.

The XML Framework's high level goals include:

- standardize FSA’s data exchange using XML as the data exchange technology standard
- achieve consistent and accurate data
- enable data clean up and maintenance activities
- establish standard data tools and processes to support consistently performed data/XML modeling through standard tools and processes that will be aligned with community and government standards initiatives
- provide system flexibility to simplify future interface changes and support new application and data exchange requirements, through XML-based data modeling for system interfaces
- use XML and Data Modeling best practices in order to model key business data for exchange and storage
- establish an XML governance process to maintain and refresh FSA's XML capabilities
- define processes to ensure timely and accurate communications with FSA’s business partners regarding XML implementations and changes
- develop an XML infrastructure that supports usage of advanced capability, such as Service Oriented Architectures (SOA) and real-time transactions

High level requirements for Technical Strategies include:

- standardize external exchange of commonly referenced data through a single, virtual, secure FSA gateway to simplify communication with FSA
- enable access to key business services for the external community
- right-time exchange of necessary data with trading partners
- clarify, communicate, and enforce data access standards with external trading partners

5. **Data Quality** - This team, lead by Jane Holeman, serves as the catalyst for establishing an ongoing, enterprise-wide data quality methodology. Their goal is to identify issues that, when addressed, will have the highest impact on FSA's Strategic Objectives.

This team has established the following overall priorities:

- common identification methods for students, trading partners, and aid
New XML Listserve Announced

Trish Pottersmith, Associate Director of Information Systems and Processing at the University of Colorado at Boulder, recently started a new listserv for schools and vendors who have been or are beginning processing with XML, whether it be COD, Commonline, ISIR’s, etc.

Being what she calls a “survivor” as a full participant in the COD project last year, her experience was that it would have been very helpful to have had some people to confer with. She has set the purpose of the listserv as a place to offer support for people just starting, as well as those continuing, like us.

She’s invited the US Department of Education’s Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) to participate as well (and they have already enlisted), and anyone else.

She believes the purpose of this list is unique, and is not served by the other lists currently available to Financial Aid Professionals.

As some background information, she provides the following about her institution: Boulder is a mainframe school, using SCT as a vendor for COD. She found there was plenty to contend with - changing procedures, changing the way they edit files, getting used to the COD web site, etc.

Her colleague from the FSA, Devin Croft, and she did a session at NASFAA this past year on COD and they presented the idea of helping each other via a list at that time. She will make that presentation available to those who participate in the listserv.

It doesn’t really matter whether you are mainframe school, an EDExpress one, or if you use another product or vendor. If you are working with the new processes, like XML, etc, she invites you to come along. If you think there are staff in your office or data center that would be interested, please share this information with them.

To sign up, send an email to listproc@colorado.edu with the following in the body of your message: subscribe FINXML YourEmail Address YourFirstName YourLastName. Example: subscribe FINXML trish.pottersmith@colorado.edu Trish Pottersmith.

You will receive a confirmatory email in response directing you on how to use the list. There is a digest option that allows all daily emails to be condensed into one email per day, making it easier to manage should traffic on the list become high.

Reminder
Registration for PESC’s Technology Summit is still available! The Summit, offered free of charge to the higher education community, will be held October 21-22, 2003 in Austin TX at the Radisson Hotel & Suites. Space is limited, so registration is required. To receive the discounted hotel rate of $95, reservations must be made by September 17, 2003. Visit www.StandardsCouncil.org for more information!

PESC Community Calendar
Check out PESC’s Community Calendar! Located at www.StandardsCouncil.org, under the “Events and Links” tab, this community calendar provides a quick glance of the major technology-related conferences and events in higher education. Updates are made constantly, so check often to ensure you are up to date on the latest events in higher education.
End users, software providers and software vendors all support standards-based software development, according to a June 2003 Delphi study. The study, titled “The Value of Standards,” is based on more than 800 participants’ responses to questions about the current attitudes and expectations for software standards. The study can be accessed at www.delphigroup.com/research/whitepapers/20030728-standards.pdf.

As voice recognition software begins to enjoy a larger adoption rate, it has evolved to allow callers to use multiple phrases instead of specific words, as well as allow the system to trigger transactions without the need for a human operator. Combined with speech-to-text and text-to-speech technology, it can support even more emerging applications, although it is not quite to the point where it can recognize anything a caller may say. Voice XML (VXML) is an extension of XML that lets developers for corporations and service providers take advantage of work that already has been done to put applications and information on the Web. Released in Version 1.0 in 2000, it is now in Version 2.0. VXML. In addition, the Speech Application Language Tags (SALT) standard, backed by Cisco Systems Inc., Intel Corp. and Microsoft Corp., also is coming on the scene.

UT Austin Internet Server ‘SPEEDEs’ Along

July 2003 volume included:

- 38,068 TS130 transcripts
- 28,104 TS131 acknowledgements
- 4,779 TS997 Functional acknowledgements
- 11,116 TS189 Admission Applications
- 2,083 TS138 test score reports
- 96,916 total transactions
- 129 entities sent transcripts (plus about 300 Florida schools not counted as separate entities.)
- 199 entities received transcripts (same qualifier as above.)

This was an all time high.

According to CNET news.com article, “businesses have little to
gain from replacing EDI quickly.” The article, “The truth about XML,” points to cost, lack of wide-spread adoption, and continual fluctuation in standards as some of the reasons business are not abandoning EDI for XML. The article may be accessed at http://news.com.com/203010851025872.html?tag=sas_email

The World Wide Web Consortium has released the W3C process document, which describes the organizational structure of the consortium and the processes related to the responsibilities and functions exercised to enable W3C to accomplish its mission. It, however, does not include information about the groups internal workings or its public communications mechanism. The group is accepting comments via process-issues@w3.org. To read the document please see http://www.w3.org/2003/06/Process-20030618/. A more scaled down summary version of the document may be accessed at http://xml.coverpages.org/xmlPapers200307.html#W3CProcess

The Financial Services Technology Consortium recently praised the Liberty Alliance and Security Assertion Markup Language, for sparing customers the chore of maintaining multiple sets of IDs and passwords. By supporting single sign-on, according to an InformationWeek article, “Identity-Management Plans Draw Praise.” Liberty Alliance has published a set of technical and business guidelines for a “federated” identity model in which the user logs in once at the beginning of a transaction and SAML assertions provide authentication at the intermediate stages, thus eliminating multiple sign-ons, while simultaneously maintaining authentication security.

Sun Microsystems, Oracle and three other companies have come together to propose a “composite application.” The proposed specification set is called Web Services Composite Application Framework, or WS-CAF. The proposed standards are designed to remove guesswork and ambiguities; they define a method of coordinating Web services transactions from distributed systems in one composite application or new Web service, according to an InformationWeek article, “Suns Proposed to Web Services Standards.” The group has not yet determined to which standards body it will submit its standard. Additional information may be obtained at http://www.informationweek.com/story/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=12803408.

Enrollment in for-credit distance education courses grew from 1.344 million in 1997-98 to 2.876 million in 2000-01, according to a study released by the Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics. In relation, the number of for-credit courses also grew, to 118,100 in 2000-01 from 47,500 in 1997-98. Unlike the past, where videoconferencing dominated the distance education delivery methods, the survey found that 90 percent of the institutions offering distance education courses used online technologies that did not have human-interaction components, and 43 percent reported offering Internet-based courses that also incorporated live-interaction technologies.

The Department of Education is proposing changing a privacy law that requires a student’s handwritten signature before a college is permitted to release transcripts and other personal data, by allowing the student to agree online to the release, according to an article in the August 6 edition of the Chronicle of Education. Current rules do not specifically address electronic authorizations, therefore some institutions are already allowing for electronic release, leaving those schools to feel that the Department is simply catching up. Both the current rule and the proposed change are based on the Department’s interpretation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. The Chronicle may be accessed at www.chronicle.com.

In what is billed as a good reference article examining the role of standards and open source software, The Rational Edge offers definitions of key terms, the history of open standards, the role of open source software, as well as middleware, and a list of open source projects among other items. To obtain the article for reading or in PDF format for reference visit...
http://www.therationaledge.com/content/jul_03/f_open_dh.jsp

The reason that XML is everywhere, both in standards creation and in product development is business related, according to Peter Abrahams of IT-Director. While XML is well-defined and works well, according to Abrahams, Microsoft and Sun, amongst others, were on the committee developing the language and their endorsement and active support and implementation drove the take up. But with all that said, “The real drive behind XML is that the business executives can understand the benefit,” wrote Abrahams. To access his article in its entirety visit http://www.itdirector.com/article.php?articleid=11152.

The Web Services Interoperability Organization (WS-I) recently announced delivery of the WS-I Basic Profile 1.0. The Profile is a set of specifications that guarantees Web services interoperability if users adhere to the profile’s guidelines and vendors include WS-I BP 1.0 support in their implementations. See http://www.eweek.com/article2/0,3959,1216861,00.asp

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- data exchange improvements
- and isolated data cleansing
- education and communication regarding data usage for analytics

The next step for this team is the creation of a Data Quality Assurance Plan that will define this concept in more detail and provide the framework necessary to create a viable quality assurance strategy.

6. Data Framework - This team, lead by Keith Wilson, is comprised of leaders from all other teams and serves as a Steering Committee for FSA’s overall Data Strategy.

FSA’s Data Strategy was introduced to the community at its last Software Developers Conference held August 14-15, 2003 in Washington DC. This conference was preceded by a focus group whereby FSA brought in leaders and experts within higher education and communication regarding data usage for analytics to solicit feedback in a small group setting. FSA will continue to provide updates and information as appropriate. FSA has targeted October and November of this year to provide updates and draft documentation that will outline further direction and specifications.

For those looking to get on-board, FSA’s next Software Developers Conference will be held November 6, 2003 at the Manchester Grand Hyatt in San Diego. Also, FSA’s COO Terri Shaw just announced on August 25, 2003 their annual Electronic Access Conferences (EACs) held each fall. The conferences, provided free of charge, are identical but repeated to allow those interested two options for attending. The first will be held at the Manchester Grand Hyatt in San Diego, California, November 2-5; the second will be at the Sheraton New Orleans in New Orleans, Louisiana, December 2-5, 2003.

The EACs review updates to the Title IV delivery system and help financial aid professionals to efficiently and effectively manage all aspects of student aid delivery. The theme for this year is "Getting Aid Right." The following are just some of the topics to be addressed at the EACs:

- Delivering Aid in the 21st Century and Beyond
- Resolving Conflicts in Determining Student Eligibility
- Return of Title IV Funds
- Common Origination and Disbursements
- What Students Need to Know About Federal Student Aid
- FAA Access to CPS Online
- 2002-2003 Direct Loan Closeouts
- EDExpress Updates
- NSLDS Updates
- Benefits of Using XML
- CommonLine and the Common Record