

Access⁴

March 2026

Welcome to an Exciting Chapter for the A4L Community!

by Steve Smith, Executive Director

It is truly an exciting and invigorating time to be an active part of the A4L Community. There is so much positive energy and momentum driving numerous productive projects forward, fueled by the dedication of our members. This was undeniably evident at our recent 2026 SDPC & Unity Convening in the beautiful city of Long Beach, just a couple of weeks ago.

If you happened to miss the Convening, you missed what many are calling our best event in many years! The level of engagement, the quality of the content, and the stimulating conversations were exceptional. We were particularly pleased to see that the attendees were very closely split—nearly 50/50—between those focused on privacy and those focused on interoperability. This balance led to incredibly rich discussions across all sessions, ensuring that both critical

pillars of our mission received equal attention and energy.

Our unique venue, the majestic Queen Mary, a beautifully preserved 1930s luxury steamliner, served as an amazing and inspiring backdrop. Its interesting history and scenic views of the Long Beach harbor provided a truly memorable and distinctive atmosphere for our work. We encourage all members to keep a close eye out for an upcoming announcement about the venue for next year's Convening, as we are committed to finding another location that is just as unique and memorable to host our Community.

As you delve further into the contents of this newsletter, you will see a comprehensive overview of the tremendous work currently underway across the Community. This vital work includes:

SDPC Registry 2.0: The next evolution of the Student Data Privacy Consortium's foundational registry, enhancing security and usability for all stakeholders.

NDPA Updates: Continued refinement and updates to the National Data Privacy Agreement framework, ensuring it remains the gold standard for data

(Continued on page 2)



Steve Smith, Executive Director

IN THIS ISSUE

Global Community News

Welcome Stephanie Swiderski to the A4L Team; Welcome new Members!; The A4L Community gets a re-brand; 2026 SDPC & Unity Convening: Overview; Scheduled Maintenance; an Update from the Association Board of Directors; 2026 Elections: Nominations now open!; True-Ups Using the SIF Infrastructure; and Community Project Team Updates.

Page 2

NA Community News

2026 Elections: Nominations now open!; A Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing Unity; and, Building the Foundation for AI-Ready Education and Workforce Systems.

Page 13

Student Data Privacy Consortium (SDPC) News

SDPC Resource Registry 2.0: Momentum is Building!; Vendor Member Benefits: Legislative Tracking and Discounted Privacy Training; COMMUNITY REVIEW: National Data Privacy Agreement (NDPA) v2.3—now open!; and new FERPA 101 Training course launched!

Page 17

Global Community News

Welcome to an Exciting Chapter for the A4L Community!

(Continued from page 1)

sharing agreements across the nation.

Global Education Security Standard (GESS): Progress on establishing an international benchmark for education technology security, broadening the impact of our work worldwide.

Unity Implementation: Accelerating the adoption and real-world deployment of the Unity interoperability framework to streamline data exchange.

AI Usage & Resources: Developing guidance, best practices, and resources for the responsible, ethical, and effective use of Artificial Intelligence within educational settings.

Supporting the EDUcore Project: Contributing our expertise and resources to this crucial initiative aimed at defining core data elements for education.

It is absolutely crucial to recognize that **you**, the members of the A4L Community, are the true drivers of all this essential work. Your expertise, commitment, and time are what translate vision into reality. As our membership continues its steady and encouraging growth, so too does our collective capacity to undertake increasingly ambitious and impactful projects. I am profoundly proud and honored to be a part of such a dedicated, talented, and impactful Community!

Welcome Stephanie Swiderski to the A4L Team!

We are absolutely thrilled and excited to announce and welcome **Stephanie Swiderski** as the newest member of the A4L team, stepping into the crucial role of **Registry 2.0 Support Manager**. Stephanie brings an impressive and extensive background to A4L, marked by many years of dedicated experience as a leader in education technology and an expert instructional designer.

Her professional journey encompasses a diverse array of impactful roles within the education sector, demonstrating her comprehensive understanding of both the classroom environment and technological integration. This includes time spent as a dedicated classroom teacher, an assistant lecturer in higher education, a technology integration specialist, and a technology coordinator.

This rich, multifaceted experience is perfectly aligned with the demands of her new role. Furthermore, Stephanie is deeply committed to delivering clear, user-centered training programs, providing responsive, frontline support to our community, and fostering strong stakeholder collaboration. Her passion for these areas is directly aimed at advancing critical student data privacy practices nationwide—a core mission of A4L. This unique combination of deep technical and educational background, coupled with her commitment to our mission, makes

her the ideal individual to serve as the Registry 2.0 Support Manager and an invaluable addition to our organization.

Stephanie hit the ground running, joining us recently at our annual Convening. This provided a fantastic opportunity for her to meet many of our long-standing community members in person and immediately begin forging connections. The Convening also served as an excellent and comprehensive introduction to the Student Data Privacy Consortium (SDPC) community and the critical work we do together.

We invite all members of the community—our team, partners, and stakeholders—to join us in extending the warmest possible welcome to Stephanie as she begins this exciting new chapter with A4L and the SDPC Community!



Stephanie Swiderski,
Registry 2.0 Support Manager

Welcome new members!



AbleSpace

Ablespace Inc



Avodah

Avodah Software



CADpractice LLC



*Capital City Public Charter Schools,
DC*



Chibitronics Inc.



*EdTech Leaders Alliance
(Kentucky Alliance)*



Epic Kids Inc.



Factors Education Inc.



FullBloom.



inTIERvention LLC



Math Facts Pro



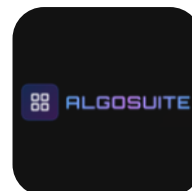
Oncore Education



OpenStax



Presto Assistant LLC



Ripple Productions Inc.



Skyward Inc.



Sterling Public Schools USD376, KS



Veracity Verification Solutions



Wasatch Wise LLC



Wonde Inc.

The A4L Community Gets a Re-Brand

by Ben Silbergitt, A4L Evangelist

Have you seen our new logo? If you're reading this newsletter, then you have! But the work being done at A4L is about much more than just a new logo. In this article, I will give you a brief tour of all the rebranding work that's happening at A4L.

New Logos and "Hybrid" Brand

OK, so the new logo is still a good place to start. Because there is meaning behind the logo, which helps explain what we are accomplishing with our rebranding effort. Besides the new font, and the slant that gives it a sense of motion, you also probably noticed that the "4" in A4L has four different-colored flags coming off of the right side of the number. These represent the 4 main areas of focus for the organization, which are also represented in the new tagline that often appears below the logo: Community. Interoperability. Privacy. Security.

Community (yellow) represents the A4L community as a whole, the grassroots, volunteer-led partnership across vendors, states, alliances, and school districts who all come together to drive the work of the community forward. This is such a critical aspect of the organization, and is what makes us truly unique in education; making sure we incorporate and balance all

these different voices, to arrive at long-lasting solutions that solve real, salient problems for our membership.

Interoperability (light green) represents SIF, Privacy (orange) represents SDPC, and Security (red) represents GESS. These brands are part of the A4L umbrella, but also live on their own with separate logos - these logos will emphasize the Schools Interoperability Framework, the Student Data Privacy Consortium, and the Global Education Security Standard, but also acknowledge that these individual brands are "powered by A4L".

This is part of our "hybrid brand" approach - which lives somewhere between a "branded house" (think Apple, with its single brand on many different product lines) and a "house of brands" (think P&G, with their many individual brands like Crest and Tide, that stand on their own with little to no tie-in back to the P&G brand). The goal of the hybrid brand approach is to eliminate confusion for individual members of the community who may join only out of interest in one area (e.g., SDPC or SIF) and would not recognize the A4L brand, while still maintaining a connection to the A4L community and giving people a clear path if they are interested in getting more

involved in our grassroots movement.

Stronger Messaging

Along with the new logos and the hybrid brand approach, we also worked with Slalom, a global consultancy that provides some pro bono work for non-profits, to more deeply understand how to improve our messaging to members. Our goal here was to improve clarity and drive engagement across everything from our website's home page to our password reset email. Slalom interviewed a range of members, and found the following key themes about communication from A4L:

- *Desire for Clarity.* There was a clear preference for straightforward language and avoiding outdated terminology. We will be focusing on moving away from unclear acronyms, lengthy brand descriptions lacking relevance, and overly complex multi-tiered branding.
- *Outward Presence.* The A4L community and subject matter experts are the source of quality and consistency that customers trust, yet there's a perception of being behind the curtain vs. the voices in the rooms where they should be.

(Continued on page 5)



The A4L Community Gets a Re-Brand

(Continued from page 4)

We will be focusing on empowering our members with tools to help them speak confidently for the organization.

- *Community-First.* The proof of value is overwhelmingly reflected by the work of the A4L community. Growth from the ground up mentality is a critical driver in being known in the industry as the org that “shows and not tells”. Our move to a hybrid brand will actually allow us to more clearly communicate the value of this community.
- *Hurdle to Adherence.* Members that understand the value are lifelong members. But there’s a perception of investment for customers needing to get products set up that can act as a deterrence in adoption. We will be looking at ways to better engage new members of the community to get them familiar and set up for success to experience the unrivaled value A4L offers.
- *Siblings, not Twins.* SIF and SDPC are pushed together under the A4L brand, but audiences do not mesh internally and externally across their distinct focus areas.

Again, the hybrid brand approach will allow us to more clearly communicate this distinction, and more clearly and purposefully bring the communities together, when it makes sense to do so.

- *Uniquely Positioned.* Interviewees unanimously expressed a desire for a unified future state where privacy and security are at the center of a more data-secure world. As we improve our communication in the areas listed above, we will be able to fully realize the opportunity that this unique community provides, connecting and securing effective learning ecosystems®.

What's Next

We have just begun our rebranding journey, beginning with logos and banners on emails, websites, and slide decks, and moving towards communication patterns that more clearly come from “SDPC” or “SIF”. We are now working on revising content across the website, in our regular emails and newsletters, blog posts, etc. to focus on these key themes that strengthen and provide clarity to our message. Behind the scenes, we will also be working on ensuring sustainability with this change, strengthening internal processes to ensure consistency of

our brand and key messaging, as well as ongoing communication with membership to measure our success and make any needed course corrections.

So, stay tuned and you’ll begin to notice a shift across our various communications. We’ll also be reaching out occasionally to make sure we are hitting the mark. And as always, please let us know if you have any questions, suggestions, or concerns.

We’re a community committed to
**building secure and
effective digital ecosystems.**

2026 Student Data Privacy Consortium (SDPC) & Unity Convening: OVERVIEW

The 2026 SDPC & Unity Convening brought the Access 4 Learning Community together for a truly energizing and impactful gathering, reinforcing both the strength of our work today and the promise of what lies ahead. Held as a four-day, immersive experience, the convening focused on Privacy, People, and the Power of Unity, creating space for meaningful dialogue, practical learning, and community connection.

Across the event, participants consistently shared positive feedback on the depth of collaboration, the quality of the sessions, and the clear momentum building across the Community. From seasoned leaders to newer members, attendees left with a renewed sense of purpose and confidence in the future direction of SDPC and Unity initiatives.

A highlight of the convening was the range of thought provoking presentations and panel discussions showcased throughout the agenda. Sessions explored how Unity is moving from concept to practice, with real-world insights into statewide adoption efforts, including perspectives from Oklahoma and Maine, offering valuable lessons on implementation, governance, and collaboration. These discussions provided practical context for how Unity is helping connect and secure education data ecosystems with interoperability and privacy built in.

Equally valuable were the open discussions and roundtables that encouraged participants to reflect on the evolving role of the Community, the value of bringing SDPC and Unity work

together, and opportunities to expand impact through shared learning and partnership.

The SDPC Resource Registry 2.0 hands-on training sessions were another standout component of the event. Attendees had the opportunity to explore the redesigned Registry through guided, interactive sessions that walked through new functionality, enhanced navigation, and upcoming capabilities. These sessions provided actionable guidance for Alliance members preparing for migration to Registry 2.0, as well as insights into the rollout plan and future phases of development.

The practical nature of these trainings was widely praised, equipping participants with the tools and confidence to apply what they learned immediately within their own organizations.

A Strong Community, Looking Ahead

Beyond the sessions themselves, the convening reinforced what makes this Community unique: open collaboration, shared values, and a collective commitment to protecting learners while enabling innovation. Networking events and informal conversations helped strengthen relationships and foster new connections across states, districts, vendors, and partners.

As the 2026 SDPC & Unity Convening concluded, the message was clear: the Community is not only growing, but moving forward together with clarity, momentum, and optimism. The insights, tools, and connections formed during the event will continue to shape the next chapter of SDPC and Unity work in the months ahead.

All presentations from the 2026 Convening can be found in the [Presentation Archive](#).



Thank you to our 2026 SDPC & Unity Convening Sponsors

THANK YOU to our **GOLD Sponsors!**



THANK YOU to our **SILVER Sponsor!**



THANK YOU to our **LOGO Sponsors!**



Scheduled Maintenance

Our regular maintenance schedule is timetabled for the last Friday of each month from 8pm ET until COB on Sunday.

Scheduled maintenance will be taking place on the **SDPC Resource Registry, SIF Test Harness and operational databases.**

We are sorry for any inconvenience that this may cause and advise you to plan your work accordingly.



UPDATE: Association Board of Directors

Over the past three months the Association Board has reviewed and approved a number of contracts, the SIF Data Model Specification (AU) 3.6.4, new A4L branding direction and logos, and a 2025 finance report provided by the Executive Director. Recently the Board is sifting through the input from the Leadership Groups on potential new vision & mission statements with the goal of drafting new statements in the near future. The Association Board has been highly engaged during the last quarter, successfully approving

several significant items. These approvals encompass new contracts, the AU 3.6.4 SIF Data Model, a refreshed A4L branding direction and associated logos, and the 2025 finance report presented by the Executive Director. Currently, the Board is reviewing input solicited from the Leadership Groups concerning prospective new vision and mission statements, with the objective of finalizing these statements shortly.

2026 ELECTIONS: Nominations now open!

The A4L Community has had phenomenal leadership over the past few years. The leadership, guidance and overall dedication to the Consortium prove critical to our collective successes, but now it is your chance to get involved and nominate yourself, or a colleague, to be part of these great leadership teams!

We are delighted to confirm that nominations for the International Technical & Privacy Leadership Group (ITP-LG) are now open! **Nominations can be submitted from Monday, March 30 - Monday, April 20, 2026** (inclusive).

International Technical & Privacy LEADERSHIP GROUP

What is the commitment? The Leadership Group meets every four (4) weeks in virtual calls for 60 minutes, but also may be asked for opinions or votes 'off-cycle' during their tenure. We appreciate the leadership and the 'brain lift' they provide!

What is the term? The Leadership Groups are elected for two-year terms.

How many positions are available? This year there will be four (4) seats open for the International Technical & Privacy Leadership Group.

What are the candidate requirements? To be eligible to run for the Leadership Group, the individuals shall be at least eighteen (18) years old and

be an A4L Community Voting Participant or employed by/representing an A4L Community Voting Participant and duly authorized to represent that A4L Community Voting Participant, but need not be residents of the District of Columbia. An A4L Community Voting Member institution may have at most one representative on this Leadership Group at one time.

Any A4L Community Member (globally) may nominate, or be nominated for one of these Leadership positions. *(An A4L Community Member is classed as an organization who pays membership dues directly to the A4L Community, and has voting rights.)*

For the 2026 A4L Community Annual Election process, the following dates apply:

- ◇ *March 9, 2026:* Announcement to membership that elections will occur
- ◇ *March 30, 2026:* Nominations open
- ◇ *April 20, 2026:* Nominations close
- ◇ *April 22, 2026:* Elections Committee convenes to confirm ballot
- ◇ *May 6, 2026:* Ballot released
- ◇ *May 20, 2026:* Voting closes at 5:00 pm Eastern
- ◇ *May 21, 2026:* Elections Committee convenes to confirm results
- ◇ *Spring (date TBD, virtual):* Elections results announced during the A4L Annual Meeting

To view the current Leadership Groups representatives, please [click here](#).

To view the 2026 Elections Policy & Procedures, please [click here](#).

We will use a virtual election tool and all nominations must be submitted electronically. Any A4L Community Member can submit a nomination in the virtual election tool. The Primary Business Contact ('Key Contact') will be the official vote for each A4L Community Voting Member.

Please consider nominating yourself, asking someone to nominate you or nominate someone else to run for one of these leadership positions within the Community!

For more information on the North American Leadership Group positions available, please [click here](#).



True-Ups Using the SIF Infrastructure

by John Lovell, Technology Director

Executive Summary

Event-driven synchronization gets most SIF ecosystems “nearly” correct—until real-world operations introduce drift: missed publishes, edge cases, manual database edits, and other out-of-band changes. A **True-Up** is a **periodic reconciliation** that forces a consumer data store (often an **Operational Data Store / ODS**) back into alignment with the **source of truth** (typically a Student Information System / SIS) by retrieving the full record set for a domain, ingesting what is returned (add/update), and removing what is *not* returned (delete-by-absence). **This is explicitly not a “first-of-year initialization.”**

True-Ups are best understood as **data hygiene**: they don’t replace events; they close the last gap—moving fidelity from “~99%” toward “as close to 100% as practical.” A pragmatic cadence is **once or twice per week** for manageable datasets, because True-Ups are designed to catch edge cases rather than serve as the primary sync mechanism. The approach has been possible since **SIF 2** via request/response patterns, but **SIF 3** makes it more feasible due to improved performance characteristics.

Abstract

A True-Up is a bulk reconciliation pattern implemented with standard SIF request/response operations to ensure a consumer’s datastore accurately mirrors a provider’s current dataset, including the difficult case of determining what should no longer exist. This paper defines True-Ups, explains where they fit within SIF Infrastructure, provides an implementation blueprint (including optional hashing/flagging

optimization), and documents operational pitfalls—especially performance impacts and the scalability limits of delete-by-absence for very large datasets

What a True-Up Is (and what it is not)

Definition

A True-Up is a **corrective synchronization pass** executed during normal operations (mid-year, mid-term, continuous operation) to reconcile a consumer datastore with the provider’s authoritative dataset.

Not “first-of-year initialization”

A True-Up is **not** the annual “load everything at the start of the year” initialization. It exists because—even after an initial load—events can fail to represent reality perfectly across time.

Why True-Ups are necessary even with eventing

In an ideal world, events would be sufficient. In practice, gaps happen: direct database edits, edge cases where an update occurs without a publish, and other imperfections that prevent the consumer from matching the provider’s true state.

Why It Matters (decision-maker framing)

The governance problem: trust in downstream data

If the ODS (or other consumer) is used for reporting, accountability, data products, or downstream exchange, drifting even slightly from the source can undermine confidence and create operational risk. True-Ups provide a systematic mechanism to restore trust by periodically proving alignment with

the provider’s truth.

What True-Ups deliver

- **Higher fidelity** than event-only pipelines by catching missed changes.
- **A verified picture of current reality**, including what should no longer exist in the consumer (the “negative space” problem).
- **Operational resilience**: a recovery pathway when assumptions about “perfect publishing” fail.

When you need True-Ups

You need True-Ups when providers are “less than perfect”—whether due to inherent system limitations or untracked manual processes. Practically, most real environments qualify, making True-Ups a strong baseline hygiene practice.

How often

Because True-Ups are intended to catch edge cases (not replace events), a typical cadence is **once or twice a week** for most datasets.

Where True-Ups Fit in the SIF Infrastructure

True-Ups are not a special SIF feature or a new concept: they are implemented using standard **request/response** retrieval patterns that have existed since **SIF 2**. What changes in modern implementations is feasibility: **SIF 3**’s



True-Ups Using the SIF Infrastructure

(Continued from page 9)

improved performance characteristics make bulk retrieval and reconciliation more realistic at scale.

Key positioning:

- **Events** remain the primary mechanism for near-real-time change propagation.
- **True-Ups** are the periodic reconciliation backstop that confirms and corrects full-state alignment.

True-Up Workflow (high-level)

A True-Up can be described as a three-phase reconcile loop:

- **Retrieve the full dataset**
 - ◇ Example: retrieve all *StudentPersonal* records from the SIS/provider.
- **Ingest everything returned**
 - ◇ Create new records if absent in the ODS; update existing records if changed.
- **Remove anything not returned**
 - ◇ Any ODS record not present in the provider's full response is treated as deleted (or otherwise no longer valid) and removed (or inactivated) in the consumer datastore.

This last step—ensuring not only what is present is in sync, but also what is not present—is the distinguishing val-

ue of True-Ups versus many “refresh” patterns.

Implementation Blueprint (developer guidance)

Scope selection

Start with domains where drift is high-impact and volumes are manageable:

- Students (*StudentPersonal*)
- Staff
- Enrollments (with sequencing considerations)
- Program participation objects, etc.

Efficient change detection (optional but recommended)

A practical optimization is to avoid field-by-field comparisons:

- **Pre-pass flagging:** mark all existing ODS records in-scope as “not yet seen in this True-Up.”
- **Hashing:** store a hash of canonicalized record content; compute hash for incoming records and compare to determine whether an update is necessary.
- **Seen clearing:** as each provider record is processed, clear the “not yet seen” marker and update the stored hash (if used).
- **Deletion sweep:** after processing all incoming records, any remaining “not yet seen” records are candidates for delete-by-absence.

Delete semantics

Delete-by-absence is straightforward for moderate datasets. It becomes problematic for very large datasets (e.g., attendance at extreme scale), where re-fetching everything just to infer deletions is not operationally realistic.

Practical mitigations (implementation/

architecture choices):

- Prefer **soft-delete** or **deletion metadata** patterns where feasible (e.g., keeping deletion markers or complementary deletion logs) so deletes can be communicated without full re-extracts.
- Use True-Ups for large datasets only with **careful scoping** (partitioning, partial windows, or reduced cadence).

Referential integrity and processing order

True-Ups at the “document/object level” do not automatically solve cross-object integrity issues. If child objects reference parent objects, processing order matters:

- True-Up **Students before Enrollments** to avoid transient orphans and support consistent ingestion.
- If the source system itself violates referential integrity (e.g., enrollments referencing missing students), True-Ups can expose the problem but cannot fully correct provider-side integrity defects.
- Where ordering cannot be guaranteed, adopt an **eventual consistency** strategy (deferred validation/retry) rather than hard-failing ingestion.

Operational Considerations

Costs and resource impact

True-Ups are “heavyweight” because both sides pay:

- **Provider load:** bulk extraction and outbound transfer of large record sets.
- **Consumer load:** reconciliation compute, hashing/compare, and bulk writes/deletes.



True-Ups Using the SIF Infrastructure

(Continued from page 10)

Scheduling and orchestration

- Use **off-peak** windows.
- Stagger object domains if multiple True-Ups are required.
- If doing partial True-Ups (by school, district, year, etc.), maintain a clear ledger of what has been reconciled and when.

Monitoring and accountability

True-Ups should produce measurable outputs:

- count of adds/updates/deletes applied
- timing metrics (duration, throughput)
- anomaly detection (spikes may indicate eventing or provider issues)

Pitfalls and Limitations

- **Time and resource cost**
 - ◇ True-Ups can stress both provider and consumer systems due to bulk processing demands.
- **Delete-by-absence does not scale infinitely**
 - ◇ For extremely large datasets, inferring deletions by full extraction is not workable at high frequency; additional architectural patterns are required.
- **Operational complexity for partial True-Ups**
 - ◇ If you partition scope, you must track which scopes were reconciled to avoid blind spots.
- **True-Ups can mask deeper interoperability defects**
 - ◇ If True-Ups routinely correct large numbers of issues, the event pipeline or provider behavior likely needs improvement. Over-reliance can reduce pressure to fix systemic publishing problems.

Conclusion

True-Ups are a practical, standards-aligned reconciliation pattern that leverages SIF's existing request/response capabilities to keep consumers (like ODS systems) aligned with the provider's source of truth—including the critical requirement to remove records that no longer exist. They should be treated as **periodic data hygiene**, not a replacement for event-driven sync, and generally executed **once or twice weekly** to capture edge cases without imposing undue load. When implemented with disciplined scoping, optional hashing/flagging optimizations, correct object processing order, and realistic deletion strategies for large datasets, True-Ups materially increase data fidelity and confidence across interoperable ecosystems.

To view the PDF, please [click here](#).

Community Project Team Updates

ASSOCIATION

Association Board of Directors: See [Page 7](#) for update.

Policy & Procedures: This group continues to focus on updating policies for the Community.

Marketing, Communications & Membership: The Committee reviewed the Branding Implementation Plan - focusing on branding decisions like logo and tagline, establishing a hybrid communication model - and began to explore AI for efficiency. Discussions also addressed Community Member conduct and possible revisions to the Membership Agreement.

INTERNATIONAL

International Technical & Privacy Leadership Group (ITP-LG): The group provided important oversight of emerging AI-supported SIF Infrastructure work, helping ensure that AI-generated white paper content, standards-aware tooling, and accelerated development practices were applied thoughtfully, with appropriate attention to quality, reliability, and strategic value.

Global Education Security Standards (GESS): The GESS Project Team will soon be announcing who will be awarded the RFP to provide third-party GESS certifications.

Infrastructure: The team advanced SIF Infrastructure work by actively applying AI to generate initial white paper content, support standards-aware tooling, and deliver meaningful gains in development speed, debugging effectiveness, and overall implementation efficiency.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): The team's most important work was advancing the concept of AI agents with direct normative references to standards, helping shape a future in which AI can engage specifications more accurately, consistently, and responsibly as a trusted aid to implementation, validation, and transformation.

Vendor: The group reconvened their meeting (every 3 months), providing a forum for Vendors to get together and discuss any issues and/or questions.

AUSTRALIA

AU Leadership Group (AU-LG): The AU Management Board continue their discussions on AU activities.

AU Technical Project Team: The AU Technical Board continue discussions on proposed updates to SIF Implementation Specification (AU).

NORTH AMERICA

North American Privacy Leadership Group (NA-P-LG): Since December, the NA-P-LG has provided input on A4L's mission and vision, approved the educator privacy course, and approved opening the NDPA v2.3 Community Review.

North American Interoperability Leadership Group (NA-I-LG): The group's most important work was providing oversight and direction for the upcoming Unity 4.4 quality release, helping guide late-stage changes, review priorities, and approval decisions so the specification remains clear, implementable, and aligned with community needs.

Discipline: Our discipline team has not been meeting as it waits to see how its work is incorporated into the Unity 4.4 draft.

SEDM: This team worked on advancing the Special Education Data Model (SEDM) as a high-priority, cross-community initiative by refining milestone recommendations, shaping its positioning at Ed3 and A4L, and building momentum for broader state participation.

State Requests: This team worked on advancing the Special Education Data Model (SEDM) as a high-priority, cross-community initiative by refining milestone recommendations, shaping its positioning at Ed3 and A4L, and building momentum for broader state participation.

Unity Adoption: During this period this team was helping align Unity adoption efforts with real market needs by shaping convening sessions, clarifying priority use cases such as StudentParticipation and orphaned records, and keeping attention on practical implementation guidance.

NDPA: The NDPA wrapped up proposed edits for NDPA v2.3 and recommends opening the Community Review to receive feedback from the broader A4L Community.

SDPC Alliance Leadership: The group provided input on the educator privacy training course, talked through common redlines they are receiving from vendors, documented alliance-specific rules for using Exhibit G and H, and provided input on roundtable sessions during the annual convening.

SDPC Resource Registry Roadmap (R3): This group is currently paused during the initial Registry 2.0 migration.

News from the North American Community

2026 ELECTIONS: Nominations now open!

The A4L Community has had phenomenal leadership over the past few years. The leadership, guidance and overall dedication to the Consortium prove critical to our collective successes, but now it is your chance to get involved and nominate yourself, or a colleague, to be part of these great leadership teams!

We are delighted to confirm that nominations for the North American Interoperability Leadership Group (NA-ILG) and North American Privacy Leadership Group (NA-P-LG) are now open! **Nominations can be submitted from Monday, March 30 - Monday, April 20, 2026** (inclusive).

NA INTEROPERABILITY LEADERSHIP GROUP

What is the commitment? The NA-ILG meets twice a month in virtual calls for 60 minutes. The Leadership Group also may be asked for opinions or votes 'off-cycle' during their tenure.

What is the term? The Leadership Group are elected for one-year or two-year terms.

How many positions are available? This year there will be ten (10) seats open for the North American Interoperability Leadership Group (2 x 1yr term; 8 x 2yr term).

NA PRIVACY LEADERSHIP GROUP

What is the commitment? The NA-P-LG meets once a month in virtual calls for 60 minutes. The Leadership Group also may be asked for opinions or votes 'off-cycle' during their tenure.

What is the term? The Leadership Group are elected for one-year or two-year terms.

How many positions are available? This year there will be thirteen (13) seats open for the North American Privacy Leadership Group (5 x 1yr term; 8 x 2yr term).

Candidate requirements for both Leadership Groups: To be eligible to run for the Leadership Group, the individuals shall be at least eighteen (18) years old and be an A4L Community Voting Participant or employed by/representing an A4L Community Voting Participant and duly authorized to represent that A4L Community Voting Participant, but need not be residents of the District of Columbia. An A4L Community Voting Member institution may have at most one representative on a Leadership Group at one time.

Any A4L Community Member based in North America may nominate, or be nominated for one of these Leadership positions. (An A4L Community Member is classed as an organization who pays membership dues directly to the A4L Community, and has voting rights.)

For the 2026 A4L Community Annual Election process, the following dates apply:

March 9, 2026: Announcement to membership that elections will occur
March 30, 2026: Nominations open
April 20, 2026: Nominations close

April 22, 2026: Elections Committee convenes to confirm ballot
May 6, 2026: Ballot released

May 20, 2026: Voting closes at 5:00 pm Eastern

May 21, 2026: Elections Committee convenes to confirm results

Spring (date TBD, virtual): Elections results announced during the A4L Annual Meeting

To view the current NA Privacy & Interoperability Leadership Groups representatives, please [click here](#).

To view the 2026 Elections Policy & Procedures, please [click here](#).

We will use a virtual election tool and all nominations must be submitted electronically. Any A4L Community Member can submit a nomination in the virtual election tool. The Primary Business Contact ('Key Contact') will be the official vote for each A4L Community Voting Member.

Please consider nominating yourself, asking someone to nominate you or nominate someone else to run for one of these leadership positions within the Community!

Any questions, please contact [Penny Murray](#), Community Director.



A Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing Unity

by Ben Silbergitt, A4L Evangelist

Unity is the newest version of the SIF Specification, providing a consistent data model that backwards maps to existing SIF 2.x implementations as well as aligning to the CEDS standard, while also providing a modern infrastructure that includes a secure REST API for data transport. While Unity has been around for a while, planning and implementing a change to a new version of a data standard can be a tremendous undertaking, especially when that standards-based enterprise data ecosystem has been around and working well for many years. However, a combination of the significant value of upgrading to Unity, as well as the clean road map created by ensuring back-

wards compatibility with the data model, has led to a groundswell of large institutions moving towards Unity. There are now multiple Unity implementations in place at a statewide level, in production and running successfully!

In part thanks to these early pioneers, we have learned a great deal about the “what I wish I would have known before I started” that happens with any large scale data project. Now, the SIF Infrastructure Project Team has taken on the job of codifying all those “wish I had knowns” into an easily-accessible knowledge base for the next batch of folks implementing Unity. The guide is intended to help organizations assess readiness, plan scope, understand dependencies, and navigate implementation decisions. While our “guide” will certainly have some very detailed content, our goal is to create a more interactive, self-guiding tool that allows folks to easily get information at just the right level of depth and scope for what they need to know, based on their role and

where they are in the process.

We’ve started the work by developing an outline of some of the key topics we’d expect to cover. Again, the outline is meant to help us think about the types of content we’d want to include in our repository of useful and easily navigable information, but please don’t think of it as a traditional outline like you’d see for a book. We aren’t expecting anyone to read through all our information cover to cover (although we think it beats counting sheep...). What the outline is meant to do is help us make sure we are bringing to the fore all the relevant and necessary information that would be relevant to organizations looking to implement Unity. We’ll have a more interactive way for folks to access and navigate that information - stay tuned for more on that, and in the meantime we wanted to share our outline, for folks that are interested. We’d love to get your feedback and ideas. Please feel free to reach out to [John Lovell](#) or [Ben Silbergitt](#) with your thoughts about these proposed categories!



Unity / SIF Implementation Guide — Proposed Categories

1. Introduction and Purpose

- ◇ What Unity / SIF Unity Is (and isn't)
- ◇ Why States Use It — Goals and Benefits
- ◇ How It Fits with Other State Data Initiatives (e.g., State IDs, Generate, PESC, CEDS)
- ◇ Audience Overview: Technical vs. Leadership vs. Vendor Stakeholders
- ◇ Key Principles: Interoperability, Data Governance, and Transparency

2. Getting Ready: Pre-Implementation Planning

- ◇ Readiness Assessment
 - Determine technical, policy, and cultural readiness
 - Inventory existing systems and data flows
- ◇ Governance and Leadership Alignment
 - Establish decision-making authority
 - Define communication channels and escalation paths
- ◇ Interoperability of People

- Setting expectations for collaboration
- Managing staff turnover and institutional knowledge
- Building shared understanding across state, vendors, and districts
- ◇ Project Dependencies
 - How Unity fits with other parallel efforts (state ID, modern data warehouse, etc.)
 - Sequencing and interdependencies

A Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing Unity

(Continued from page 14)

3. Key Decisions to Make Up Front

- ◇ Data Profile Definition
 - What data objects are in scope
 - Vetting “real” district data early — not test data
 - Aligning with the right code sets (CEDS, state, local)
- ◇ Data Exchange Architecture
 - Directionality: read-only vs. read/write
 - Eventing vs. request/response workflows
 - Delayed providers, queue-based orchestration
- ◇ Technical Standards
 - Choosing JSON (typically PESC JSON) vs. XML
 - Schema strictness: strict vs. lenient validation
 - Versioning, endpoints, and broker configuration
- ◇ Performance Expectations
 - Frequency of exchanges (real-time, nightly, scheduled)
 - SLAs and timing for responses
- ◇ Credential Management and Security
 - Credential distribution and lifecycle management
 - Environment configuration (test vs. production)
 - Communication protocols for issue reporting

4. Implementation Process

- ◇ Project Management Approach
 - Phased rollout and pilot testing
 - Risk and issue tracking
 - Handling interdependencies between systems
- ◇ Tooling and Transparency
 - Audit logs, dashboards, and monitoring systems
 - Validation suites or certification tools
 - Checkpoints for data flow verification
- ◇ Vendor and District Engagement
 - Establishing clear expectations and SLAs
 - Encouraging adoption of real-time data sharing
 - Addressing “dirty data” fears and building trust
- ◇ Testing and Validation
 - Test data vs. production data
 - End-to-end validation workflows
 - Error handling and feedback loops

5. Data Governance and Culture

- ◇ Building Trust in Data Sharing
 - Overcoming cultural resistance to transparency
 - Managing privacy and access concerns
- ◇ Policy Considerations
 - State vs. local authority for data use
 - Compliance with state and federal requirements
- ◇ Data Stewardship and Quality
 - Continuous validation and error reporting
 - Role clarity between business and technical teams

6. Technical Deep Dives (for Optional Deeper Sections)

- ◇ Broker architecture (open-source options, configuration patterns)
- ◇ Eventing vs. Changes Since
- ◇ Schema validation strictness
- ◇ Real-time vs. batch synchronization
- ◇ Writing back state IDs and grades
- ◇ True-ups
- ◇ “Deletes”
- ◇ Managing multiple JSON “flavors”
- ◇ Request/response troubleshooting

8. Reference Materials

- ◇ Glossary of Key Terms
- ◇ Example Data Profiles and Code Sets
- ◇ Case Studies or State Examples
- ◇ Archived Training Materials and Recordings
- ◇ Links to Specification, Confluence Pages, and Tools



Building the Foundation for AI-Ready Education and Workforce Systems

EDUcore is a vendor-neutral, philanthropically funded initiative building a shared “meaning layer” for the U.S. education-to-workforce data ecosystem (PK20W+). Rather than creating a new standard, it provides a governed semantic backbone that makes the standards already in use easier to understand, implement, and connect — so data retains its intent as it moves between districts, states, vendors, and employers.

Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming how education and workforce systems operate - but there's a fundamental problem: the data infrastructure these systems rely on isn't ready.

Today, critical data about learners and workers is scattered across disconnected systems. While interoperability standards do exist, they are fragmented, inconsistently implemented, and often fail to align across sectors. The result? Costly, one-off integrations, inconsistent data meaning, and limited ability to scale innovation. In this environment, even the most advanced AI tools struggle to deliver reliable insights.

A New Approach to Interoperability

EDUcore is tackling this challenge head-on. EDUcore is a Gates-funded initiative powered by multiple data standards to create an AI-friendly infrastructure for education and workforce.

Rather than introducing yet another standard, EDUcore focuses on aligning what already exists. The initiative is

building an AI-friendly shared semantic backbone - a common framework that makes existing standards easier to connect, interpret, and scale across the full PK20W+ ecosystem, from early education through the workforce.

Developed in collaboration with leading standards bodies and supported by organizations such as the Gates Foundation, Strada, and the U.S. Chamber Foundation, EDUcore is designed to work with current systems - not replace them.

What EDUcore Delivers

At its core, EDUcore provides four key capabilities:

A Common Semantic Backbone—A linked-data model grounded in established standards that creates consistent meaning across systems.

Use-Case Driven Mappings—Practical, versioned mappings tied to real-world scenarios, enabling systems to exchange data without losing context.

A Practical Reference Library—A searchable, implementation-ready resource that lowers the barrier to adoption - especially for under-resourced institutions.

A Safe, Future-Ready Architecture—Infrastructure designed for modern AI workflows, with built-in guardrails for privacy, provenance, and accountability.

Why It Matters

By creating a shared foundation for interoperability, EDUcore enables faster, lower-cost data exchange and makes AI systems more reliable and trustworthy. It also opens the door to scalable innovation across education and workforce sectors - benefiting institutions, employers, and, most importantly, learners and workers.

The Bottom Line

EDUcore is building the interoperability layer that makes AI truly usable across education and workforce systems.

By aligning existing standards into a shared semantic infrastructure and practical reference framework, organizations can retain their current systems while gaining the ability to share data securely, consistently, and at scale—unlocking the full potential of AI.

News from the Student Data Privacy Consortium

SDPC Resource Registry 2.0: Momentum is Building!

by Stephanie Swiderski, Registry 2.0 Support Manager

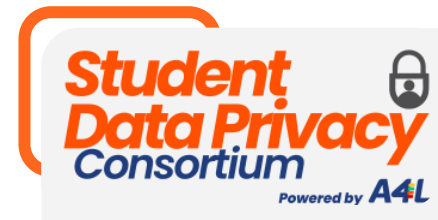
Registry 2.0 is officially up and running, with Alabama and Colorado successfully launched.

We are now deep into Group 2, migrating Indiana, Florida, and Hawaii. We are especially excited to welcome Indiana and Hawaii as newer alliances to the Community!

To support this transition, we are developing a suite of customizable training videos and materials. These will be hosted on the community website soon—stay tuned for a formal announcement once they are live.

Looking Ahead

The Group 3 migration strategy will focus on Michigan, Minnesota, South Carolina, and Wyoming. For this phase, we are shifting to a collaborative group approach. This model features joint training events and meetings for alliance leads and district champions, fostering a space where states can share insights and provide mutual support throughout the entire journey—from initial pre-migration onboarding to a successful launch into the Registry.



Registry 2.0 Development

In parallel, phase 2 of the Registry development will begin soon. This phase will address required functionality for Alliances with more complex needs.

Watch your inbox this summer for specific details on moving your state into the new system!

Vendor Member Benefits: Legislative Tracking and Discounted Privacy Training

by David Sallay, Director of Data Privacy



State legislatures have been actively proposing all kinds of bills that will impact edtech vendors, ranging from limits on AI, new privacy requirements, and restricting screen time in general. To help A4L Community Members keep better on top of these developments, we have partnered with the Public Interest Privacy Center (PIPC) to provide a [legislative tracking sheet](#) (login required), which will be updated biweekly. If you have any questions about these bills, please contact [David Sallay](#), Director of Data Privacy.

We also wanted to remind vendor members of the Vendor K-12 Education Privacy Awareness Training, which is a go at your own pace training that was also developed with PIPC and consists of three modules: privacy basics, using the NDPA, and complying with NY law. A4L members receive a 20% discount to access the training.

For more information and how to register, please visit the [webpage](#).

COMMUNITY REVIEW: National Data Privacy Agreement (NDPA) v2.3—now open!

The NDPA Project Team has put in a lot of work understanding issues and concerns related to the NDPA and has prepared 10 proposed changes that we're hoping will form a NDPA v2.3. Though they've put in a lot of hours, we've come to the ultimate quality control check: you. The purpose of the Community Review is to get perspectives from the broader community to make sure that the proposed changes will work better for both our alliances and vendor members.

If your organization hasn't participated in a Community Review before, we highly encourage you to provide input this time. Here are some key things for you to know:

- There are 10 proposed changes for this round. For each, we've provided a redline to easily see the change along with a rationale for the change to help you understand the project team's thinking.
- We are only looking for feedback on these 10 proposals. When this review closes, we plan to have a feedback period where we can understand issues more broadly

and use that to plan out what we're hoping will be an eventual NDPA v3.0.

- The Community Review is only open to A4L members. In order to get to the review form, you will have to login using your A4L credentials. All documentation can be found on the [A4L Community Site](#).
- We have created a feedback form for collecting community input. Part of this includes a simple yes/no vote each of the 10 changes. In this way, even if you don't feel like you have a lengthy comment to give, you can still show at a high level whether you approve of the change.
- For each item where you think the Project Team has missed the mark, you will also have the ability to provide alternative language along with your own rationale.

The first round of the Community Review will last 4 weeks from April 7 to May 5, 2026. Please plan accordingly to make sure you have enough time to



review the proposed changes and provide feedback.

After the first round, the NDPA Project Team plans to spend several weeks reviewing all of the feedback received. Based on the feedback given, they may recommend revisions and a second round of feedback.

Any questions, please contact [David Sallay](#), Director of Data Privacy.

New FERPA 101 training course launched



The A4L Community has also launched a training program specifically for those decision makers in schools involved with app vetting and ensuring that the district is complying with privacy law. A4L Community Members will receive 2 seats for this training as part of their membership (note: many districts are considered "participating districts" and though they have access to the NDPA and SDPC Resource Regis-

try, they are not A4L Community Members).

Otherwise, the training will be available for \$100/seat. Anyone who wants to buy in bulk can get a 50% discount if purchasing more than 50 seats.

For more information, please [click here](#).

Community Meetings Schedule

<u>Day</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Staff Liaison</u>
ASSOCIATION			
<i>meetings are based on US Eastern time zone</i>			
Wednesday	2 nd Weds, monthly	Association Board of Directors	Steve Smith
Tuesday	4 th Tues, monthly	Policy & Procedures	Penny Murray
INTERNATIONAL			
<i>meetings are based on US Eastern time zone</i>			
Tuesday	2 nd Tues, monthly	Data Privacy	John Lovell
Wednesday	Every 2 weeks	Infrastructure	John Lovell
Wednesday	Every 2 weeks	Artificial Intelligence Project Team	John Lovell
Thursday	Every 4 weeks	International Technical & Privacy Leadership Group	John Lovell
Thursday	4 th Thurs, monthly	Global Education Security Standards (GESS)	David Sallay
Thursday	2 nd Thurs, quarterly	Vendor Project Team	Penny Murray
NORTH AMERICA			
<i>meetings are based on US Eastern time zone</i>			
Monday	Every 2 weeks	State Requests	John Lovell
Tuesday	1 st & 3 rd Tues, monthly	Unity Adoption	John Lovell
Tuesday	1 st Tues, monthly	SDPC Resource Registry Roadmap (R3) Project Team	Penny Murray
Wednesday	4 th Weds, monthly	NA Privacy Leadership Group	David Sallay
Wednesday	Every 2 weeks	SEDM Project Team	John Lovell
Thursday	Every 2 weeks	SDPC Alliance Leadership	David Sallay
Thursday	Every 2 weeks	Discipline	John Lovell
Thursday	Every 2 weeks	NA Interoperability Leadership Group (formerly NA-TAC)	John Lovell
Thursday	Every week	NDPA Project Team	David Sallay

Connect with us!

Access 4 Learning (A4L) Community



Student Data Privacy Consortium
(SDPC)



About the Access 4 Learning Community

The Access 4 Learning (A4L) Community, and its special interest group the Student Data Privacy Consortium (SDPC), is a unique, non-profit collaboration composed of schools, districts, local authorities, states, US and International Ministries of Education, software vendors and consultants. The Community is “Powered by SIF” as its major technical tool to help manage learning data simply, securely and in a scalable, standard way regardless of platform. The SDPC is designed to address the day-to-day, real-world multi-faceted issues faced when protecting learner information by setting common expectations between market providers and end users. The A4L Community has united these education technology end users and providers in an unprecedented effort to **“connect and secure effective learning ecosystems”** to give teachers more time to do what they do best: teach. For further information, visit <https://A4L.org>

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