

*Welcome to the first issue in 2011 of our quarterly newsletter, which aims to inform and educate school administrators on the process of performing enrollment projections and other topics related to school demography.*

## NJ SMART

As you probably are already aware, the NJDOE has eliminated the Fall Report in 2010-11 to capture enrollment and replaced it with NJ SMART, a database that should do away with many reporting redundancies. Despite appearing to be quite innocuous, the change in enrollment reporting has had a negative effect on school demographers and performing enrollment projections.

As we have seen before in reports like the ASSA, the problem is all about reporting special education students. The Fall Report was excellent in that only self-contained special education students were reported, which had an effect of lowering the special education counts and mainstreaming more students into the general education population. With the advent of NJ SMART, the method of reporting special education students has been very different and includes special education students not only that are self-contained, but those who get pulled out of general education classrooms for instruction. This has led to much larger special education counts than previously reported in the Fall Report. So what is the big deal? If you are performing enrollment projections using historical data from NJ SMART and the Fall Report, the new reporting method will have the unintended effect of lowering the survival rates from one grade level to the next (provided total enrollment is constant) since students appear to be leaving the general education population. In short, this can lead to projecting lower general education counts from the erroneous survival rates.

So what are our options? In districts that I have been working with, district officials have modified the NJ SMART data to reflect only the self-contained special education population to maintain a level of consistency with prior reporting methods in the Fall Report. Unfortunately, this tedious process may have to occur for the next few years until there is enough historical enrollment data from the new reporting process. In the meantime, we will have to make changes to the enrollment data to ensure high-quality enrollment projections.

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