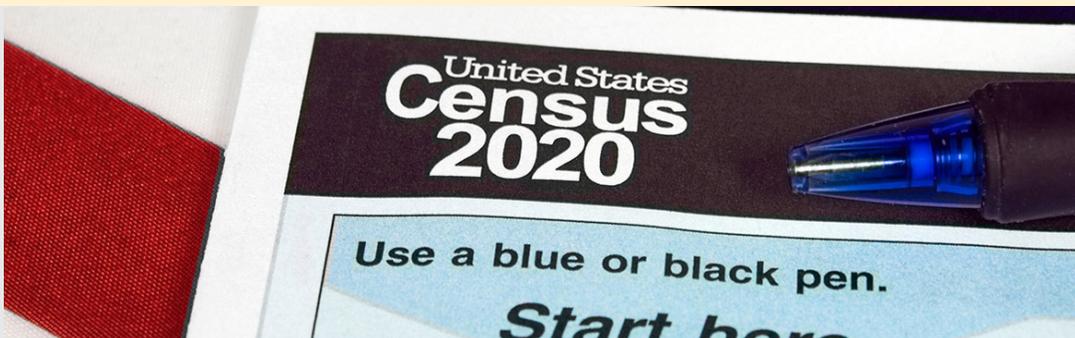


## Stand Up and Be Counted

On April 1, 2020, the federal government begins a process that occurs once every 10 years: counting (or attempting to count) every person living in the U.S. and collecting demographic data from them.

The Census has significant implications for public schools. The data help determine how billions of federal education dollars are distributed, since funding formulas rely heavily on population and poverty levels.

This report details why an accurate census count is integral to ensuring that schools receive the funding to which they are entitled. It explores key factors that impact how populations are counted and what school boards in New York can do to ensure an accurate count in their communities.



### 2020 CENSUS CRITICAL TO PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING

- ▶ Census data help determine how billions of federal education dollars are distributed, since funding formulas rely heavily on population and poverty levels.
- ▶ In 2019, the U.S. Department of Education provided New York an estimated \$2.6 billion for elementary and secondary schools.

### Why is the census important to schools?

States with the greatest number of people and the highest concentrations of poverty receive proportionally greater amounts of federal aid than other states. If those groups are not accurately represented in the census, states will have a harder time meeting the needs that exist in their communities.

In 2019, the U.S. Department of Education provided New York an estimated **\$2.6 billion** for elementary and secondary schools.<sup>1</sup> That total included about \$1.2 billion in Title I funding, which is targeted toward economically disadvantaged students and represents the single largest K-12 funding stream in the federal budget. Total funding also included more than \$860 million for special education. New York also received about \$783 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the 2018 fiscal year for the National School Lunch Program, which provides free or low-cost meals to disadvantaged children.<sup>2</sup>

Census data also impact programs that improve the health and well-being of children,

which bolsters their ability to learn. This includes funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Census data also affect public education indirectly by determining how many seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives. Greater congressional representation can help states secure additional education funding because of their increased influence. New York lost two congressional seats after the 2010 Census. In 2020, a mere 0.6% undercount could cost New York two more seats.<sup>3</sup>

### Factors impacting the accuracy of the census

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- ▶ Since federal education funding is determined largely by census data, an accurate count is necessary to ensure adequate levels of aid.
- ▶ Undercounts threaten the integrity of the data – particularly among children and immigrants. The Annie E. Casey Foundation noted that the 2010 census had the worst undercount since 1950.

<sup>1</sup> Funds for State Formula-Allocated and Selected Student Aid Programs. U.S. Department of Education Funding. New York.

<sup>2</sup> Child Nutrition Tables. Food and Nutrition Service. U.S. Department of Agriculture.

<sup>3</sup> Health and Welfare Council of Long Island. The 2020 Census: Every Person Counts!



Census, children aged 0-17 were undercounted by an estimated 1.267 million.<sup>4</sup> The greatest undercounts were for children aged 0-4, who were undercounted by nearly 1 million (see chart). The Annie E. Casey Foundation noted that the 2010 census had the worst undercount since 1950.<sup>5</sup>

million undocumented immigrants in New York State in 2017.<sup>8</sup>

New York is also home to a relatively large number of unaccompanied immigrant minor children who were released to adults who are responsible for their physical and mental well-being. According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the state saw an

tion distributed to students and families, the district website, school board meetings and signs/electronic billboards on school property.

3. Make information about Census 2020 an item on every board meeting agenda.
4. Partner with local parent-teacher associations to stress the importance of the census. Information can be distributed at dinners, book drives and other events.
5. Incorporate census information in civics education lessons. School boards could direct the superintendent to include educational activities for students and families on the importance of filling out the census. This directive could be done via a policy or resolution. "If the board wanted instruction on the census to be an ongoing commitment, then a policy would be the better route," says Jessica Goldstein, NYSSBA's deputy director of policy services. "If the board didn't want these activities to take up instructional time in the intervening years, then a resolution would be preferable." Either way, the language of a policy or resolution shouldn't specify the particular activities to be provided, but should explain why the census is important for the school, and then direct the superintendent to provide educational activities for students and families on the census and its importance. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau's Statistics in Schools program provides free activities and resources for teachers to incorporate the census into their lessons.<sup>11</sup>
6. Seek appointment to "complete count committees." These are volunteer committees that may be established by local governments and community groups to design and implement census awareness campaigns and motivate residents to respond to the 2020 Census.<sup>12</sup>

### Where are the children?

"Researchers have long believed that young children are often missed in the census because their living arrangements are complex and adults aren't always sure whether to include the children living with them on census forms."

According to the Casey Foundation, "Researchers have long believed that young children are often missed in the census because their living arrangements are complex and adults aren't always sure whether to include the children living with them on census forms. It can also be harder to count children living in communities with many multi-unit buildings."<sup>6</sup>

The Casey Foundation warns that the 2020 census could undercount children by 1.5 million. In addition to the current challenges that lead to undercounts, the 2020 census will be conducted to a large extent online, potentially omitting those without access to technology or who have difficulty using the system.<sup>7</sup>

Populations with high numbers of undocumented immigrants – those residing in the U.S. without the proper legal documentation – also tend to be at greater risk of census undercounts. Undocumented immigrants may avoid participating in the census for fear that federal immigration authorities may separate them from their families or deport them. The Pew Research Center estimated that there were about 1

influx of 26,342 unaccompanied minors from October 2013 to August 2019.<sup>9</sup>

### What can school boards do?

"School boards have a lot of power," said Rebecca Sanin, the president and CEO of the Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that is focused on educating the public about the importance of the 2020 census. "School boards can use the tremendous platform they have to get the word out."<sup>10</sup>

There are a number of key ways school boards can increase awareness and participation in the census:

1. Spread information about the census through social media platforms and districtwide newsletters. Messages about the importance of the census can be incorporated into virtually every activity within the school district, such as winter and spring recitals and sporting events.
2. Declare April a district-wide "Census Month." Information about the census can be included in all districtwide communication channels, including informa-

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. February 2014. The Undercount of Young Children. U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration.

<sup>5</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. June 27, 2018. One Million Missing: Undercount of Young Kids in 2020 Census Threatens Gains.

<sup>6</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. April 12, 2019. Census 2020: New Research Identifies Factors Linked to Undercounting Kids.

<sup>7</sup> Harper, A. September 24, 2018. Inaccurate census counts could impact funding for pre-k, other programs. Education Drive.

<sup>8</sup> Passel, J.R. and Cohn, D. June 12, 2019. Mexicans decline to less than half the U.S. unauthorized immigrant population for the first time. Pew Research Center.

<sup>9</sup> Office of Refugee Resettlement. Unaccompanied Alien Children Released to Sponsors By State. Published: September 27, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication with Rebecca Sanin. Oct. 1, 2019

<sup>11</sup> American Counts staff. September 3, 2019. Statistics in Schools Program offers new activities for 2020 census. U.S. Census Bureau.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 2020 Census Complete Count Committee Guide.