

2020 Census is critical to school funding

Beginning April 1, 2020, the federal government begins the once every decade process of 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 more than how billions of federal education dollars are distributed, since funding formulas rely heavily on population and poverty levels.

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

Census data also impact public education indirectly by determining how many seats each state has in the US House of Representatives. Greater congressional representation can help states secure additional education funding because of their increased influence. Massachusetts is at considerable risk for losing one of our seven congressional seats unless an accurate count can be obtained.

Federal funding tied to the census

More than \$3 billion comes to Massachusetts each year from the federal government directly based on census counts. The funds support education, health care, transportation, housing and more. In 2019, the US Department of Education provided MA with an estimated \$689 million for elementary and secondary schools. That total included \$255 million 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 \$318 million in special education funding.

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 (SNAP), Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

If the 2020 census undercounts Massachusetts residents, the state risks losing funding for a full decade—essentially an entire child-

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Massachusetts Students Lead Nation in Advanced Placement Success for Fourth Year

For the fourth year in a row, Massachusetts is the top state in the nation for the percentage of the graduating class that scored a 3 or higher on an Advanced Placement exam. According to results released by the College Board earlier this month, for the first time, one out of every three members of the class of 2019 in Massachusetts graduated with a score of 3 or higher on an AP test. The Commonwealth also had the highest 10-year percentage growth of graduates who scored a 3 or higher.

That accomplishment reflects both strong participation – 47.9% of

Massachusetts' class of 2019 took at least one AP exam while they were in high school – and frequent success, with 33.8% of the overall class of 2019 scoring 3 or higher out of a possible 5 on an AP exam. Both figures were increases over the class of 2018.

Participation in AP exams by members of the class of 2019 rose by 1.3% compared to the prior year, and the number of graduates who scored a 3 or higher rose by 3 percent. A score of 3 or above on an AP exam indicates that a student is capable of doing the work for an

introductory college-level course in that subject area, according to the College Board.

Massachusetts is considering ways to further reduce the AP exam fee for some additional low-income students for whom it is an obstacle. Currently, the state covers part of the exam cost for students in districts that are designated in need of assistance under the state accountability system, and a separate state grant to Mass Insight Education and Research helps defray the cost at schools where Mass Insight supports the AP program. In addition, districts can also use some of their funds to help cover student costs.

Hispanic, Latino and Black stu-

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NATIONAL NEWS

ED delays changes to rural low-income schools

The US Department of Education has reversed course and decided not to change how it distributes money to rural schools following concerns publicized by several US senators that hundreds of schools could lose out as a result of the change.

At issue is the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) funding allowance. Previously, the Education Department has based its funding for this program on the share of students qualifying for free and reduced-price meals. Last month, the Department announced that it would instead use US Census Bureau data for families in poverty as the basis for REAP funding.

Responding by letter to the Department, a bipartisan coalition of 21 senators including Senators Susan Collins from Maine and Maggie Hassan from New Hampshire argued that this would deprive many districts of the only dedicated federal funding to help rural schools overcome the increased expenses caused by geographic isolation.

Earlier this week, the Department announced that they would delay any change in how the REAP dollars are distributed.

MASC NEWS

Governor relaxes open meeting law requirements

On Thursday afternoon, March 12, Governor Baker signed an Executive Order relieving government boards and committees from compliance with certain Open Meeting Law requirements during the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency. The Order gives public bodies greater leeway to hold closed-door and remote meetings, so that government agencies such as school committees may conduct business while also complying with public health recommendations regarding social distancing.

Under the Order:

- Public bodies may hold meetings without providing physical public access so long as the public has access to deliberations through alternative means.
- Alternative means include telephone or video conferencing and other methods of providing real-time public access to government meetings.
- When public participation at a meeting is required by law (such as a public hearing), the alternative means of public access must allow for active, real-time participation (such as an open conference call or live stream video with a comment option).
- Public bodies may allow for remote participation in meetings by all members, including the chair, with no members being physically present at the meeting location.
- All other provisions of the Open Meeting Law remain in effect (posting meeting notices, recording and approving meeting minutes, executive session requirements, etc.).

The Order is effective immediately and remains in effect until rescinded or until the Governor's State of Emergency is terminated.

(Summary provided by Ashland School Committee member Marc Terry, Esq., who is also an attorney at the law firm of Mirick O'Connell and a past president of the MA Council of School Attorneys.)

MASC testifies at statehouse on education and local aid

MASC, together with MASS and the MTA, presented compelling testimony at a recent hearing before the Joint Ways & Means Committee on the need to address in the upcoming budget some of the funding disparities and oversights in the Governor's proposed budget and the newly enacted Student Opportunity Act (SOA).

Noting that the ability to fund SOA depends on the health of the

MASC POLICY NEWS

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to impact many aspects of school plans and ways of conducting meetings, events and day-to-day logistics, MASC urges districts to examine their policies around the following areas that may be affected: attendance; travel (out-of-state and in-state); absences; graduation; testing; admission requirements; building maintenance; homework; school closings; collective bargaining requirements; and school sponsored trips. MASC is currently reviewing these as well and we will keep members apprised of any changes that we think may be applicable.

economy (an unknown, especially as the pandemic and the global stock markets continue their ongoing roller coaster behavior), MASC emphasized the urgency of remedying the manner in which low income rates and headcounts are calculated in order to more equitably designate distribution of funds and that low income enrollment numbers be released on a more efficient schedule so as to allow districts to account for students the count may have missed.

Another area of concern is the amount of time that school district teams are having to spend on the SOA long and short form reports with a request to adjust these in future years. MASC also advocated for increased funding to several programs including Medicaid eligibility and funding; McKinney-Vento reimbursement; METCO; support for small and rural schools; and emphasized the need to ensure that the promise of charter mitigation holds even in an economic downturn. "If there is a slump, charter reimbursement may not be funded, but charter schools will still take their piece of district dollars."

CENSUS

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hood. And it is unfortunately the case that the populations most in need of the services these programs provide (low income and immigrant communities and communities of color) have historically been undercounted.

Factors impacting accuracy

Since federal education funding is determined largely by census data, an accurate account is necessary to ensure adequate levels of aid. Several factors threaten the integrity of the data.

One is undercounts—particularly among children and immigrants. In the 2010 Census, children aged 0-17 were undercounted by an estimated 1.267 million. There are estimates that as many as 2 million children under age 5 were missed nationally in the last census with as many as 20,000 in MA alone.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation which collects health, wellness, economic and educational data on children and families, 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 the census forms. It can also be harder to count children living in communities with many multi-unit buildings.

The Casey Foundation warns that that 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.

No question on censorship

School districts with large numbers of undocumented immigrants tend to be at greater risk of census undercounts. Undocumented immigrants may avoid participating in the census for fear that federal immigration authorities will use the information for deportation purposes.

Although the Trump administration tried to include a question about citizenship on the census it was blocked by the Supreme Court. The result is that there is no citizenship question on the 2020 census.

What can school committees do to encourage full participation?

There are a number of ways school committees 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.
2. Declare April a district-wide "Census Month." Information about the census can be included in all district-

wide communications, including information distributed to students and families, the district website, school committee meetings and signs on school property.

3. Add Census 2020 to every school committee meeting agenda until the process ends in December 2020.
4. Partner with local parent-teacher associations and school councils to stress the importance of the census.
5. Incorporate census information in civics education curricula. Also, the Census Bureau has "Statistics in Schools" curricular materials for all grade levels that relate census data to real world issues.

Late last month, the MA Budget and Policy Center released a report on the impact of the upcoming census on a range of education and health and human services programs in the Commonwealth. The full report can be accessed at http://massbudget.org/report_window.php?loc=Why-the-Count-Counts-2020.html

Additional material for this article is drawn from a report prepared by Paul Heiser, Senior Research Analyst for the New York State School Boards Association; and the Annie E. Casey Foundation 2018 Kids Count Data Book:

Information on and frequently asked questions about the 2020 Census is also posted on the MA Secretary of State's website at: <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/census2020/us-census.html>

AP SUCCESS STORY

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dents saw increases in both their participation and performance. In 2009, Hispanic and Latino high school graduates took 2,136 AP exams, and in 2019, they took 11,384 (which was an increase over the class of 2018's 10,068 exams). In 2009, Hispanic and Latino high school graduates received scores of 3 or higher on 1,082 exams, and in 2019, they scored 3 or higher on 5,613 exams

(which was also an increase over the class of 2018's 4,734 exams).

Black students also made gains. In 2009, Black high school graduates took 1,534 AP exams, while in 2019, they took 5,411 (which was also an increase over the class of 2018's 4,761 exams). In 2009, Black high school graduates received scores of 3 or higher on 468 exams, and in 2019, they scored 3 or higher on 1,816 exams (which was also an increase over the class of 2018's 1,620 exams).

Low-income students in Mas-

sachusetts' class of 2019 also saw improvements compared to 10 years ago. In 2009, low-income high school graduates took 5,578 AP exams, while in 2019, they took 22,906 (which was also an increase over the class of 2018's 21,905 exams). In 2009, low-income high school graduates received scores of 3 or higher on 2,464 exams, and in 2019, they scored 3 or higher on 10,933 exams (which was an increase compared to the class of 2018's 9,881 exams).

Coronavirus-related News

REMOTE LEARNING RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the Governor's announcement that schools will remain closed through at least May 4, DESE Commissioner Riley issued a statement that the Department will be providing additional guidance to districts in developing remote learning plans. The recommendations were developed with input from a wide range of stakeholders, including the MA Association of School Committees, the MA Association of Schools Superintendents, both the MTA and MFT-MA, as well as parent and student groups.

In his statement the Commissioner emphasized that the DESE guidance is a set of recommendations and does not constitute a requirement for any school district. Districts are encouraged to use these suggestions as a baseline or starting point and modify these to fit unique local contexts, capacities, and needs and customize accordingly for districts and individual students within districts.

The full report and recommendations is posted on the MASC

website in our newly created Coronavirus resource section:
<https://www.masc.org/member-resources/coronavirus>.

MSBA EXTENDS FILING PERIOD

In light of recent events, the MA School Building Authority is extending the Core Program Statement of Interest (SOI) filing period from Wednesday, April 8, 2020 to Wednesday, May 6, 2020.

MSBA encourages districts to contact MSBA staff in the event of questions or to discuss concerns about the filing process and/or obtaining the necessary votes to submit a SOI by the extended May 6 date. For more information: SOI@MassSchoolBuildings.org

Tools for Schools

MASC Joint Conference Sponsor Partner **Scholastic Education** is offering free resources to support students and staff during this difficult time. These include a collection of resources to help ease students' fears and inform them with age-appropriate information and a free website that provides students with 20 days' worth of exciting learning journeys created by Scholastic editors to span the content areas and

keep your students actively engaged and challenged.

These and other available resources are listed on their website: https://www.masc.org/images/partners/materials/Scholastic_Free-Resources_Curriculum_Teaching-The-Coronavirus-and-Scholastic-Learn-at-Home.pdf

NOMINATION/SCHOLARSHIP/RESOLUTIONS FORMS

MASC's annual packet of **FORMS YOU NEED** (including nomination forms for board of directors/life member/lifetime achievement/all state school committee; resolutions to be considered; and the 2020 presidents' scholarship form will be arriving in member mailboxes in the next week. Because the MASC office is closed for the time being, we are not receiving US mail, so if you will be submitting nominations or resolutions proposals, we ask that you submit them electronically to: gkoocher@masc.org. **The forms are posted on the MASC website: www.masc.org/member-resources/forms**

