

Institute of Educational Sciences
National Center for Education Statistics

SCHOOL SURVEY PARTICIPATION AND BURDEN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and other centers within the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) collect data on a national scale from districts, schools, and individual administrators, teachers, students and parents. The surveys, assessments and other studies vary widely in purpose and scope, but all contribute to the information available about individual schools, districts and states. In addition to creating databases for individual data collections, this compiled information is used in turn for designing future studies and drawing future samples. In 2020, NCES commissioned the National Institute of Statistical Sciences (NISS) to assemble the pair of what became a series of panels of technical experts, *Post-COVID Surveys* and *Setting Priorities for Federal Data Access to Expand the Context for Education Data* to consider opportunities for changing the sampling paradigm and process. From the NCES point of view the dual goals were - to address the rising non-response and lack of participation and to enrich the information base by linking data collections. From the points of view of school districts, schools and participants, the need was to understand and alleviate the burden of participation. The next pair of panels, *Connecting the Dots, I & II* examined the technical design and the implementation issues of coordinating the sampling across multiple data collections.

The broad recommendations of the first two panels were to develop a combined approach for data collections during each academic year and to expand the information base while gaining efficiency by linking data and eliminating redundant requests. The second pair of panels focused on identifying specific steps required to achieve the original goals for NCES and for the education community. The current panel was charged with addressing the specific recommendations for creating the necessary consolidated data resource for addressing key issues about decision-making regarding study/survey participation at each level, about burden of participation and for increasing detailed information to enable new, more effective sampling designs.

The goal set for the current panel was to address the particular recommendation of the previous panels to:

Create a supplement to the Common Core of Data (CCD) that can be used for both

- (i) Understanding and modeling non-participation, both occurrence and rationale/motivation, and
- (ii) Providing a basis for coordinating or combining NCES sampling designs and collected data across studies.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

In particular, the Connecting the Dots I & II specified that such a list would involve

- Creating a History of Participation database for districts and schools; including recruitment attempts, results, reasons for refusals or other non-response, and metrics for burden.
- Moving forward, develop a research base for studying patterns of refusal and for estimating the impact of non-response, using external sources to validate.

As noted explicitly by previous panels, success with the expansion would also depend on other aspects of data collection. Most notably, these include the building of relationships with districts and schools by using a single cross-study coordinator/recruiter and the defining of burden in terms of the district/school/respondent levels. Therefore, this panel included experts drawn from data sampling designers, data collectors, data contributors, data users and researchers. This allowed extensive cross-fertilization to ensure that each important aspect of the process and of the impact was raised. Over the course of five meetings the panel reviewed and reiterated key findings of previous panels, arrived at a number of specific recommendations, and constructed a list of variables as items for the appendix to expand the CCD (see Appendix C of the full text report).

Principal Findings:

- Burden – the primary measurable burden is time – time away from class, time away from other duties, and time that is already limited for participating in the large number of studies in which districts and schools are asked to participate.
- The ability to cope with the perceived burden, and the benefits of participating are major factors in non-response.
- The establishment of a set of NCES coordinators to develop close relationships with the districts and schools could reduce non-participation, make it easier to gather some forms of information, and increase the detail obtained in some responses.

Specific Recommendations:

The information in the appendix file to supplement the Common Core of Data (CCD) files has two primary goals – to understand non-participation with a view to reducing it, and to develop nonresponse weighting adjustments. Variables used for nonresponse weighting should be available for (nearly) all schools and be related to both non-response and to the outcome variables of the study. The requirements are not as stringent for the goals of studying non-participation.

The variables we recommend to supplement the CCD can be divided as follows:

- A History of Participation Database that contains Information from previous studies the schools were invited to:
 - This includes information in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) submissions on burden and incentives for different classes of respondents, timing, and the final disposition (AAPOR codes).
 - Variables allowing the creation of categories for reason of non-participation, expanding information contained in the OMB submissions and final disposition. This information is for use by the contractors, not for use or presentation to the districts or schools themselves.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

- School level variables including detailed school type information, school and district research policy information, school level SES variables.
- Other external variables that relate to both study outcome variables and non-response, such as percent proficiency in reading and mathematics.
- Additional student information, such as percent of students with disabilities (IDEA), English language learners, and homeless.
- Indicators of school stress, such as principal and teacher stability, crime and disciplinary information, chronic absences for students and teachers, and enrollment changes.
- Information on times of the year that the school is unavailable to participate.

Beyond the creation of the list of CCD appendix variables that was its charge, the panel also notes:

- The creation of a cohort of NCES coordinators to work closely with districts and schools in sustained relationships seem likely to:
 - Increase trust in, and underscore the relevance of, NCES surveys and results.
 - Improve likelihood of participation.
 - Improve the quality of some answers (such as reason for non-participation).
 - Provide a conduit for direct answers to some questions directly (times of year blocked off, schools that are unavailable for a year).
 - Give a pathway for other feedback when needed.
- Data on the accuracy of the time estimates in the OMB packages needs to be collected from participants for every study. This is needed both to accurately inform the prospective participants and for use in the modeling non- participation.
- Past participation based on the large number of variables available should be modeled to gauge the likely benefit to the NCES of using those variables for prediction and non-response weighting, and to assess potential biases.