

School District Review Program

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To:DCMD PRA <dcmd.pra@census.gov>

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Dear Mr. Snow,

I have overseen federal programs in rural AZ school districts for twenty years. In that time, I have witnessed how census data can impact schools, mostly in a negative way.

Here are two quick examples:

First:

Arizona is the buckle of the sunbelt. People retire here. And...most of them have quite a bit of money. When allocating federal funds to schools for grant programs like Title I, total community poverty level negatively impacts allocations in districts with an affluent retirement age population. They do not send children to schools. Usually in communities like this, people with school age children are working class and service industry professionals. Because affluent retired people lower the overall community poverty level, the Title I allocation diminishes, even though, we can tell from free/reduced lunch applications, that poverty among families with school age children has increased.

Over the last 15 years, our community has changed to be 60% or greater retirees and 40% below age 55. Our community poverty level has fallen overall from 21% to 15%...which means a decrease in federal funding for schools. Inversely, our f/r lunch status has changed from 45% qualifying for free lunch district wide to 61% qualifying.

I believe an obvious solution to this is only using the census poverty data statistics for school districts from households with children age 5-17. This would be a more accurate reflection of community poverty level and needs in schools.

Second:

Arizona is a border state. Politics aside, border states have many undocumented residents, most of whom are poor, and most of whom do not have a legal immigration status. These residents have children. Children come to school. These families are poor. Undocumented people do not open their door to government census workers. They do not return census papers. They make it a practice to fly below the radar when they are here illegally. Therefore, in communities like ours, where 40% of our school age children are from undocumented households, we are not receiving the "benefit" of having their poverty data help our community poverty level.

These are the issues that Arizona faces and it disproportionately impacts rural Arizona districts that have both affluent retirees and poor undocumented people.

Cindy

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