Peel District School Board

Student Census 2018: Count Me In Peel

2019 NSPRA National School Communications Award
Gold Medallion Award Entry
Special Communications Project

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SYNOPSIS

Over the past decade, the Peel District School Board—with 163,000 students across 259 schools—has built a reputation as an equity leader. The district is committed to continuous progress towards equity and inclusion of all through a wide range of projects to support marginalized groups. As this work evolved, it became clear that data—demographic and perceptual—was needed to best serve the district’s growing population.

To truly understand the needs of students and families, the Board of Trustees passed a motion in November 2016 to complete a district-wide Student Census by December 2018. Its purpose was to:

- better understand student populations and school communities;
- identify and eliminate barriers to student success, inclusion and well-being, and;
- establish effective programs and reallocate resources to where they are needed most.

To capture the voices of all students, the census evolved into a complex project, with four English questionnaires (K-3, 4-6, 7-12 and adult learners), including adapted versions and accommodations to support students with special education needs. To optimize participation, the census was rolled out differently by grade level and questionnaires were translated in our top 20 languages, resulting in over 60 questionnaires.

Faced with the task of engaging all teaching staff to successfully administer the census, while also building buy-in from families and students—all during a changing, tense provincial political environment—the successful implementation of the district’s first Student Census required a comprehensive, strategic communications plan.

The communications plan’s aim was to build awareness, trust and support for the Student Census among staff, students and families. Strategies and tactics, including letters, training materials, a social media campaign, translated documents, and dedicated websites, focused on the need for the census to better serve Peel students and families.

Student Census: Count Me In Peel successfully launched during Student Census Weeks in November 2018. All schools participated, including 6,719 unique home forms and 8,000 staff, with a preliminary secondary school response rate of 80 per cent. Currently in the scanning and analysis stage, the Student Census is anticipated to provide the district with invaluable data and understanding of students to inform future decision-making.
PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Background and Research

The Peel District School Board is Canada’s second largest public school board with more than 163,000 students in 259 schools, including more than 18,000 students who receive special education support. The district serves 1.4 million residents in three municipalities (Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga) in the Peel Region, located immediately west of Toronto. The region is one of the most diverse, fastest growing regions in Canada, with a population growth rate of 10.2 per cent from 2011 to 2016, and 38 per cent of residents who speak a language other than English at home.

To best serve this diverse population, the board is committed to achieving inclusion for all through continuous progress in equity. To support this work, Trustees approved a motion in November 2016 to conduct a voluntary Student Census across all Peel schools. The census would be the first of its kind for the district, as it would collect and link demographic and race-based data with students’ perceptions of their well-being, identity, family and school experiences.

In order to capture the voices of all students, including students with special education needs, English Language Learners and adult students, the census quickly grew into a complex research project. It included four hard-copy English questionnaires (for K-3, 4-6, 7-12 and adult learners), as well as adapted versions for each grade set for students with special education needs. To optimize participation, the census was rolled out differently by grade level and questionnaires were translated in our top 20 languages, resulting in more than 60 questionnaires total.

Through consultation with staff, families, advisory committees and colleagues at other districts, we learned to anticipate:

**Complexity of a district-wide census:** With 259 school and program locations, each with unique needs, it was clear that there would be significant challenges to implement a district-wide census. Staff would need to be trained quickly to ensure that student responses were reliable, authentic and kept confidential. A plan was also needed for classroom supply teachers, as these staff members would need to use training materials on the fly. We were also mindful of workload challenges experienced by staff, who saw the additional training as “one more thing.”

**Privacy concerns:** It was determined that the census would link individual student’s responses to their existing attendance, grade, and registration information to provide richer data to identify school and district-wide trends. However, this also meant that the census could not be anonymous. Students would be assigned an identification code linked to their student number; they would be required to fill out only their specific questionnaire with this code. As a result, training materials needed to address the greater room for error in the census implementation.

**History of delayed surveys with low response rates:** To prepare for our first census, staff consulted with other districts who had conducted similar projects. Only one school district had completed a similar district-wide census successfully; however, they had achieved this success after two other launches of the census, and did not launch system-wide or provide adapted versions of the census for students with special education needs. Another school district had attempted a system-wide census, but were delayed by the government’s Information and Privacy Commissioner for five months when families filed public complaints, garnering negative media attention, saying that the district had not been transparent in their research process and violated student privacy legislation.

Response rates for the Peel board’s own research surveys are traditionally low, with staff and families citing survey fatigue and lack of purpose as rationale. The board’s climate survey, *Your Voice Counts*, has had a response rate of under 10 per cent for many years, with little to no buy-in from school staff to implement the research.

**Changing political climate:** When trustees first requested a district-wide Student Census, the provincial government was led by a political party who strongly supported public education, and encouraged the collection of race-based statistics to better understand and support students. In June 2018, shortly before the launch of the census, a Conservative government and premier were elected. The new party reversed changes to the Health and Physical Education curriculum that had taught students about gender and sexual identity and expression. They instated a call-in line for parents/guardians and community members to use if they believed teaching methods in their child’s class did not align with the revised curriculum. Since the Student Census asked students to voluntarily disclose their sexual and gender orientation, many staff members were hesitant to deliver the census in their classrooms.
**Communication and operational restrictions:** The provincial and federal government set strict rules for the collection of student demographic information, including the use of particular vocabulary when referring to cultural, racial, gender and sexual identities. Many of these terms did not align with those used and supported in our district, which had the potential to lead to confusion among staff and students. For example, we were told we had to use the term *First Nations, Metis and Inuit (FNMI)* in questionnaires, instead of *Indigenous*, a term that our district had begun using in all district materials following consultations with our Peel Indigenous Network.

To overcome these challenges, the district’s Communications department worked closely with Research & Accountability staff to develop a thorough communications plan that would align with the project’s implementation plan.

**Goal:** *To build awareness, support and understanding of the Peel board’s first Student Census to capture authentic student responses, resulting in the successful implementation of the census at all 259 school sites.*

**Objectives**
1) To build awareness and understanding of the *Student Census* amongst all staff, parents/guardians and students, resulting in zero public complaints to the province’s information and privacy commissioner
2) To build buy-in from staff to implement the *Student Census* in all 259 school and adult education sites, with zero union/federation/employee association grievances
3) To implement the *Student Census* system-wide, including participation from students with special education needs and English Language Learners, resulting in a response rate of 30 per cent for parents of K-3 students, and 80 per cent for grade 4 to 12 students
4) To generate 20,000 page visits to www.peelschools.org/studentcensus from October to December 2018
5) To generate at least 25,000 positive engagements (views, likes, retweets) on the board’s social media channels
6) To generate one million positive media impressions and zero negative media coverage for the *Student Census* leading up to its launch in November 2018

**Analysis/Planning**

This research-based initiative relied heavily on the strategies and tactics outlined in the communications plan, which itself was rooted in extensive research with internal and external stakeholders.

**Regular consultation with key stakeholders**
- The Peel board formed a *Student Census Steering Committee*, consisting of central staff, trustees, school administrators and teaching union/federations to ensure full understanding of all perspectives around the implementation of the board’s first census. Feedback informed message and material development.
- *Trustees, senior administration and principal/vice-principal associations* were consulted regularly to establish key strategies to implement a successful campaign, and provide feedback on template materials.
- Parent members of the board’s *Parent Involvement Committee*—a board-level committee representing all parent councils—was consulted on the board’s communications strategy and materials prior to distribution. This group also participated in a kindergarten to grade 3 census pilot to ensure questions and materials were easy to follow.
- Peel staff attended regular meetings of the district’s various employee groups to share information, consulted with staff on messaging and garnered support from *employee unions, federations and associations*.
- Consultation sessions with the district’s *Special Education Advisory Committee and staff* were held throughout the census development process to help remove any barriers of participation for students with special education needs. They provided insight on accommodations required based on ability, ranging from custom versions and extended time to complete the census, to assistance from teaching assistants or family members.
- Through consultations with *Student Activity Councils and Peel Student President Council*, we heard that most students welcomed the opportunity to participate in the census. These student leaders agreed to serve as ambassadors amongst their peers to encourage participation at their secondary schools.
- The Peel board’s *Communications Advisory Committee*, including communications staff, union leaders, principals and superintendents, provided input from schools regarding the implementation of a district-wide campaign.
- Through the Peel board’s regular Faith Leader Meetings, attended by faith leaders from all major faiths practiced in Peel, we heard that families needed communication materials that were in simple, easy-to-understand and that they preferred to have translated information, if possible.

- Board staff met regularly with neighbouring school district staff who had conducted large-scale research projects. They shared strategies to successfully implement a district-wide census, including: translation in multiple languages; providing families with simple, key messages and ample time to understand the purpose of the census; and engaging with parent councils and other community ambassadors to build buy-in among families.

**Target Audiences**

**Internal audiences**

- senior administration
- trustees
- principals and vice-principals
- managers and supervisors
- all teaching staff
- superintendents of education
- district equity and curriculum staff
- employee unions, federations and associations

**External audiences**

- all parents/guardians of Peel board students, including newcomer families and parents of students with special education needs
- Parent advisory groups: School Councils, Parent Involvement Committee, Special Education Advisory Committee
- Students, including those with special education needs and English Language Learners
- Trustees
- Education and community partners, including faith leaders
- local, ethnic, and Toronto- and Ontario-based media

**Key messages**

- At the Peel District School Board, we are committed to providing the very best learning environments so that all students can achieve personal excellence. To help us in this work, we will launch the Peel District School Board’s first **Student Census** in November 2018.

- The census responses will help the board and schools:
  - better understand student populations and school communities;
  - identify and eliminate barriers to student success, inclusion and well-being; and
  - establish effective programs and reallocate resources to where they are needed most.

- Participation in the **Student Census** is voluntary. However, it is important the **Student Census** reflects the voices of all students—the more responses we receive, the more effective the data will be to help inform and improve programming and instruction.

- The **Student Census** will provide a snapshot of the current composition of our students so we can identify and address barriers to learning in our schools.

- The **Student Census** is confidential, but it is not anonymous. Census questionnaires are labelled with a unique code linked to each student’s ID number. This unique code allows the board’s Research Department to analyze responses while also using other previously collected data (ex. address, languages spoken at home, grades, etc.), resulting in a more thorough understanding of Peel students.

- All collected responses will be stored in a secure, confidential database and will only be accessed by authorized Research staff to identify and summarize trends. Individual parent questionnaires will not be analyzed.

- Once responses are processed and analyzed, the Peel board’s Research Department will produce a series of reports to help inform board and school decision-making for programs and instruction.

- Peel board is committed to the highest levels of privacy and confidentiality in collecting student information and follows privacy requirements outlined in the Municipal Freedom of Information & Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA).

**Budget**

The communications budget for this project was approximately $3,500 USD for translated letters and FAQs. No staff costs were incurred—all work was undertaken by district employees.

**Communication/Implementation**

**Strategies**

In a school system spread over 259 sites in three communities, it was important that the focus of the communication plan be on consistent message delivery to optimize participation. The following strategies were implemented:
- Create a theme that clearly communicates the district’s goal to hear from all students and families. The theme, Student Census 2018: Count Me In Peel, reinforced the board’s approach to building connections with families.
- Connect the project to provincial government and district goals.
- Engage all teaching staff, school administrators and teaching unions/federations as key partners.
- Build trust, awareness and support of families and students to encourage authentic participation by:
  - being transparent and open about the research collection process
  - clearly explaining why the data is being collected and how it will be used
  - ensuring families are well-informed on the option to opt out of the census as failing to do so could result in a complaint to the privacy commissioner which would negatively impact project timelines
  - providing reminders and assistance to help families successfully complete the questionnaire
- Remove barriers for participation by consulting with faith groups, community partners and special education staff.
- Empower parent councils, faith leaders, community partners and trustees to serve as advocates in their communities to help build community interest, trust and understanding of census.
- Strategically work with media to minimize confusion or misinformation about the census, limit negative coverage, and position the Peel board as a leader in equity and inclusion.
- Align messaging and work collaboratively with the province’s information and privacy commissioner to ensure all materials meet legal and ethical obligations.

**Chronological timelines of tactics**
**November 2017 to March 2018**
- Established a Student Census Steering Committee with representation from trustees, central staff and all employee federations, unions and associations. A one-page summary was provided at each monthly meeting for members to use to communicate back to their union/federation/associations.
- Created a logo and brand to use on all census materials.
- Collaborated with the district’s Research department and Steering Committee members to develop Student Census questionnaires and easy-to-follow instruction sheets for each grade bracket.
- Developed information materials targeted to families and staff, including FAQs, notification letters and a training guide. These materials were tested in the Student Census Pilot in March 2018.
- Developed and shared key messages/FAQs with trustees, senior administration and administrators.
- Held a pilot census in March 2018 at three schools, testing the reliability of the questionnaires and the effectiveness of communication and training materials. Staff and parent materials were adjusted based on feedback.

**April to July 2018**
- Provided superintendents with a high-level presentation to inform administrators of the upcoming census.
- Co-constructed an Educator’s Guide with teaching staff, and Equity and Curriculum staff, to help teaching staff guide their students through each census question. A customized version was created for K-3, 4-6 and 7-12.
  - A hard-copy guide would be provided with each classroom set of questionnaires during Student Census Weeks, as well as part of the training materials for teaching staff in advance of the census.
  - Content was written in easy-to-understand language, and included key messages to address pilot concerns.
- Held information sessions with trustees and community partners, including the district’s Parent Involvement Committee, Special Education Advisory Committee and faith leaders.

**August to September 2018**
- Shared information about the upcoming Student Census in the director of education’s start-of-year address to all school administrators. This message was also shared on the district’s website, intranet page and in the director’s “welcome back” email to all staff and letter to all families.
- Contacted local and provincial reporters to position the district as a leader in equity, resulting in multiple online, print and television media stories mentioning the upcoming Student Census (see supplementary materials).
- Presented information sessions to over 300 principals and vice-principals at association meetings, highlighting the materials that would be provided to families and staff in the following month.
- **Provided trustees and senior administration with an information package** to help them respond to public and staff questions, including targeted FAQs, key messages and briefing notes.

**October 2018**
- Created a dedicated section on the district’s external website—[www.peelschools.org/studentcensus](http://www.peelschools.org/studentcensus)—to share resources for families, including census questionnaires and translated materials.
  - The website was promoted as the main source of Student Census information.
  - Information was emailed to website subscribers and posted on school websites.
- Engaged parent councils with a **keynote presentation at School Council orientation event**, and provided a **School Council toolkit**, including FAQs, copies of letters to families, and a scripted PowerPoint for their next meeting.
- Launched **intranet site** to **house support materials for staff**, including all versions of the questionnaire.
- Created, monitored and responded to feedback received through a dedicated email ([studentcensus@peelsb.com](mailto:studentcensus@peelsb.com)) and phone line to field questions from families and staff after school hours.
- **Held presentations at Family of School meetings** to address specific school concerns or questions.
- Implemented a **social media campaign** on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram ([@Peelschools](http://twitter.com/Peelschools)). Schools and families were encouraged to use the hashtag, #CountMEinPeel, once they had completed the census.
- Drafted and shared **notification letters to all families**. Schools followed up with a **broadcast phone/email message** to ensure families were aware of the letter, which was shared on district and school websites and social media.
  - Schools sent letters home with report cards to increase the likelihood of it reaching parents/guardians.
  - Messaging was transparent and simple, and included mandatory language to meet privacy legislation; the back page of the letter included frequently asked questions.
  - All notification letters and FAQs were **translated** into the board’s top 20 languages and made available on the district’s website as well as in the school office.
- Held two **video teleconference sessions** for all elementary and secondary administrators to share key messages and review operational aspects of the census. Followed up with a **staff training package** for November staff meetings, which included a **scripted presentation**, **Educator Guides** (specific to each grade set) and staff FAQs.
- Shared a reminder of the **Student Census** launch in the **director’s monthly email message** to all staff.

**November 2018: Student Census launches in all schools**
- **Emailed** school administrators with step-by-step instructions and reminders for successful implementation of census, as well as a **census communications package**, including:
  - Scripted draft tweets for schools to use to inform their communities of the census
  - Camera-ready school newsletter articles
  - Template messaging to use on school signs
  - Template email/phone messages
- **School administrators led training sessions** for teaching staff during November staff meetings.
- **Parent questionnaire sent home** with instructions on how to return in a confidential, timely manner.
- **Reminders** shared on district/school websites and social media to encourage participation and census completion.
- Distributed a **news release** for the launch of the **Student Census**. The Communications department followed up with any media requests to minimize negative coverage.

**December 2018**
- Provided schools with resources to remind families of students in kindergarten to grade 3 to complete and return the census, i.e. phone/email script, template social media posts and a camera-ready newsletter article.

**Evaluation**

To evaluate the success of the district’s first system-wide census, we conducted focus groups and surveys with trustees, administrators and staff, and de-briefed with the district’s Parent Involvement Committee, Special Education Advisory Committee, and Student Census Steering Committee. Consultation findings are included in the following outline of the campaign’s success in reference to its objectives:
1) To build buy-in from staff to implement the Student Census in all 259 school and program sites, with zero union/federation/employee association grievances.

During the district’s Student Census Weeks in November 2018, the project was successfully implemented in 259 schools, 6,719 unique home forms and delivered to 163,053 students. The Student Census staff intranet page was accessed over 15,000 times. We did not receive any complaints from staff or unions/federations/associations; rather, staff shared that they found the Educator’s Guide very helpful in administering the census, and appreciated the after-hours support via the dedicated email and phone line set up to offer clarification.

2) To build awareness and understanding of the Student Census amongst all staff, parents/guardians and students, resulting in zero public complaints to the province’s privacy commissioner.

As a result of ongoing communication and interactions with stakeholders through letters, social media, face-to-face meetings and consultations, we were able to build a strong understanding of the purpose for the census to optimize participation. The Student Census email and phone line received 100 emails and 150 calls, respectively, with only two negative emails and one call that was not resolved. The majority of interactions were positive and were resolved by referral to existing resources. No public complaints were received by the province’s privacy commissioner.

3) To implement the Student Census system-wide, including participation from students with special education needs and English Language Learners, resulting in a response rate of 30 per cent for parents of K-3 students, and 80 per cent for grade 4 to 12 students.

The processing and scanning of the questionnaires is expected to take several months, as any handwritten response and all translated questionnaires will need to be manually inputted. However, a preliminary scan of grade 9 to 12 questionnaires found there to be an 80 per cent response rate from secondary school students, not including translated versions of the census. A similar response rate is expected for elementary students.

Most importantly, the census provided students with special education needs and English Language Learners with the opportunity to participate with all other students. Accommodations were provided at all vocational schools and sites with programs for students with development delays. The use of three adapted questionnaires and targeted communication materials supported this participation. Many teaching and special education staff and parents reached out to thank the district for capturing these students’ voices.

4) To generate 20,000 page visits to www.peelschools.org/studentcensus from October to December 2018

We promoted the Student Census website, www.peelschools.org/studentcensus, in all campaign materials and through social media. As a result, the site received over 30,000 hits within a three-month span. The majority of users remained on the page for at least five minutes. Materials on the website were accessed over 15,000 times.

5) To generate at least 25,000 positive engagements (views, likes, retweets) on the board’s social media channels

The #CountMeInPeel social media campaign was engaging and informative, resulting in over 38,000 views, likes and/or retweets, with the majority of interactions being positive. Only a handful of concerns were made via the district’s social media channels. These were addressed by staff to alleviate concerns. In some cases, parents or staff jumped in to express the need for this project. Staff used the hashtag to join the conversation and show how they implemented the census in their classrooms (see supplementary materials).

6) To generate one million positive media impressions and zero negative media coverage for the Student Census leading up to its launch in November 2018

The Student Census generated over 1.2 million media impressions in tier one newspapers and television stations from the announcement of the census to its launch in November 2018. News media ran multiple stories mentioning the upcoming census and connected the Peel board as a provincial leader in equity and inclusion (see supplementary materials). The tone of the coverage was overwhelming positive. Leading up to and during the launch of the census, there was no negative media coverage, something uncommon to other districts who ran similar research projects.

Next Steps: Following a successful launch, the next communications phase of the Student Census will be to share results with staff and the Peel community, once Research staff have develop school and district reports (expected by spring 2020). Evaluation findings will be used for future implementations of the census.
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS: Research/Background

**Primary research**

In addition to consultations with staff, the Student Census Steering Committee, Parent Involvement Committee and Special Education Advisory Committee, a **Student Census Pilot** was also conducted in March 2018 to test the validity and use of census materials, including the questionnaire, instruction sheet and training materials. The district’s Research department produced a **report with the findings** to inform the system-wide implementation and communications, including the need for a step-by-step resource for educators to administer the census in their classrooms.

**Secondary research**

To build our implementation and communications plan, we referred to the following resources and expertise from nearby school districts:

- Toronto District School Board census publications: [https://www.tdsb.on.ca/research/Research/Parent-and-Student-Census/Census-Publications](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/research/Research/Parent-and-Student-Census/Census-Publications)
- Toronto District School Board adult census: [https://www.tdsb.on.ca/research/Research/Adult-Student-Census](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/research/Research/Adult-Student-Census)
- Ottawa-Carleton District School Board student survey: [https://ocdsb.ca/about_us/departments/equity_and_diversity/student_survey](https://ocdsb.ca/about_us/departments/equity_and_diversity/student_survey)

The following provincial and federal resources were helpful in the development of the **Student Census** communications plan and supporting materials:

- Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act: [https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90m56](https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90m56)
- Ontario’s 3-Year Anti-Racism Strategic Plan: [https://www.ontario.ca/page/better-way-forward-ontarios-3-year-anti-racism-strategic-plan](https://www.ontario.ca/page/better-way-forward-ontarios-3-year-anti-racism-strategic-plan)
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS: Implementation/Communications

Student Census questionnaires and easy-to-follow instruction sheets

The Communications department worked closely with Research & Accountability staff to ensure language and branding were consistent throughout all census questionnaires. An instruction sheet was included with every questionnaire, which required clear, consistent language that could be easily translated into the board’s top 20 languages without losing key information in the process.

View all census questionnaires, including instruction sheets and translated versions, at www.peelschools.org/studentcensus
Notification letters to all families

In consultation with teaching staff and school administrators, notification letters were developed for K-3, grades 4-6, grades 7-12 and adult education students. The letters included the purpose of the census, privacy information and instructions on how families can opt out of the voluntary census. Frequently asked questions were listed on the back of the letter to help alleviate concerns. Families were encouraged to learn more by calling the district’s Research department, emailing studentcensus@peelsb.com or visiting the Student Census website.

Dear Parents/Guardians of Kindergarten to Grade 3 Students,

At the Peel District School Board, we are committed to providing the very best learning environments so that all students can achieve personal excellence. In order to do this, we must truly understand the needs of students and their families. To help us in this work, we’re excited to announce that next month we will launch our first Student Census.

In November, parents/guardians of students in kindergarten to grade 3 will receive the Student Census to fill out on behalf of their child/children. If you don’t receive a copy by mid-November, please contact the school office.

The questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. If you have more than one child in grades 4 to 6, you will be asked to fill out a separate questionnaire for each child. It will also be available from your child’s school or on the Peel board’s website: www.peelschools.org/studentcensus.

The census findings will assist the board and our schools to:
• better understand student populations and school communities;
• identify and eliminate barriers to student success, inclusivity and well-being;
• establish effective programs and allocate resources to where they are needed most.

The Student Census is confidential, but it is not anonymous. All collected responses will be aggregated into a confidential database and will only be accessible by authorized Research staff to support learning and well-being for Peel students. Individual parent questionnaires will not be analyzed. The highest levels of privacy and confidentiality in collecting information about student requirements outlined in the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (M.F.I.O.P.P.A.) and the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (P.I.E.D.E.A.) as amended for educational and research purposes only.

Participation in the Student Census is voluntary. However, it’s important to note that the richer and more reliable the information will be for school improvements.

If you have any questions, please review the fact sheet on the back of this letter. You can contact the Peel board’s Research and Analysis Department at 905-899-3010 ext. 3015 or studentcensus@peelsb.com.

As always, we thank you for your continued support as we inspire success, confidence and joy in every classroom.

Peter Justice
Director of Education
The questionnaires, notifications letters and FAQs were translated in the district’s top 20 language, and made available online and at the school’s office. The English notification letter included a cover page with the following text translated into the board’s top 20 languages: “You can find a translated version of this letter in [language] by visiting www.peelschools.org/studentcensus or contacting your child’s school.”

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**Staff training materials: Staff meeting presentation**

A staff meeting presentation was provided to all school administrators, along with a slide-by-slide script, FAQs and a copy of the Educator’s Guide to distribute to staff. The presentation included approximately 30 slides outlining the purpose of the census, the types of questions included in the census, instructions for anticipated scenarios (ex. students absent during the census, students filling out the wrong questionnaire), as well as a step-by-step guide to administering the census in the classroom. View the full presentation [here](#).

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**Why are we doing a census?**

- To **better understand** all student populations and school communities in Peel
- To **identify and eliminate barriers** to student success, inclusion and well-being
- To establish effective programs and reallocate resources to where they are needed most

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**What is the Student Census?**

**It is voluntary and confidential, but not anonymous.**

- A parent/guardian consent letter will be sent home in October for students participating in class.
- Each student is assigned a questionnaire labelled with a unique code linked to the student’s ID. Students will only be identified by a middle page insert, which will be removed once they begin the census.
- All data will be stored and kept confidential, accessed only by the Research Department.

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**Parents of K-3 students** will be invited to fill out the census on behalf of their child in November.

- Parents received a ‘Coming soon’ letter in mid-October.
- Questionnaires with clear instructions will be sent home with K-3 students in early November.
- Parents are to seal the completed questionnaire in the envelope provided and return it to the school.
- Schools will receive translated versions of the census in the top 10 languages. Additional copies in the top 20 languages can be found on the Intranet and www.peelschools.org/studentcensus

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**Kindergarten to Grade 3**

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**Grades 4 to 12**

Grade 4 to 12 students will participate in class during Student Census Weeks (Nov. 19 to 30)

- Age-appropriate questionnaires have been developed for grades 4 to 6 and 7 to 12.
- Schools can choose which day(s) to participate during these two weeks.
- Parents were sent a consent letter in mid-October, if they do not want their child to participate, they must return the cut-off portion of the letter.

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**Five steps to complete the Student Census**

1. Hand out the questionnaires
2. Go over instructions
3. Complete the census
4. Collect the Census
5. Debrief with students

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**What if...**

You have been given questionnaires for students who are no longer in your class?

- Cross out the name of the student on the tracking sheet.
- If you know the student is in another class, give the student questionnaire with the middle insert to their teacher. Otherwise, just return the blank questionnaire along with the other completed forms.
- If the student has moved, write MOVED next to their crossed out name.
Staff training materials: Educator’s Guide to the Student Census

Co-constructed with teaching staff, the Educator’s Guide provided step-by-step instructions to successfully administer the census, along with a read-along guide to help staff clarify questions with students using grade-appropriate language. Guides were used as training tools in advance of the census, and were also provided to full-time and supply teaching staff during Student Census Weeks. Three versions of the guide were produced and distributed: kindergarten to grade 3, grades 4-6, and grades 7-12.

An Educator’s Guide to the Student Census: Grade 4 to 6

At the Peel District School Board, we are committed to providing the best learning environments so that all students can achieve personal excellence. To do this, we must truly understand the needs of students and their families. To help us in this work, grade 4 to 12 students will be invited to complete a Student Census during Nov. 19 to 30. The information provided in this guide will help you to successfully administer the Student Census in your classroom.

If you have any questions, please contact the Peel board’s Resource email at studentcensus@peelsb.com.

Your Student Census package includes:
1. This educator’s guide which outlines the steps involved
2. A tracking sheet (see sample A) which lists all students
3. A Student Census questionnaire labelled with a unique middle insert (see sample B) in each questionnaire
4. An envelope for each student
5. A larger envelope for the completed questionnaires
6. Extra copies of the Student Census questionnaire

Step 1: Hand out the Student Census

Hand out the Student Census to each student, along with an a copy of the middle insert of the questionnaire (see sample B). It is an important reminder to teachers that this questionnaire will be linked to the final student report card.

Guides were used as training tools in advance of the census, and were also provided to full-time and supply teaching staff during Student Census Weeks.

Three versions of the guide were produced and distributed:
- kindergarten to grade 3
- grades 4-6
- grades 7-12

Educator’s Read-Along Guide: Grade 4 to 6

This guide provides educators of grades 4 to 6 students with prompts and talking points to help administer the Student Census. If students do not understand a specific question, you may refer to the prompts below or use your own professional judgment to help students. Keep in mind, to ensure the confidentiality of the census, you may help a student understand the question, but do not view or influence their responses.

QUESTIONS ABOUT ME

1. What is the first language you learned at home as a child and still understand? (Select all that apply)
   A first language is the language that your parent(s)/guardian(s) used to communicate with you or exposed you to from birth to three years of age. It can also be said that you are primary language(s) and you may have more than one.
   Remember to select all that apply. For example, if your dad speaks Spanish to you and your mom speaks Cantonese, you would select both languages.

2. What language(s) do you speak most often at home? (Select all that apply)
   Select the languages that you most often hear and use at home or in your daily life outside of school.
   Remember to select all that apply. For example, if your grandparents who live with you speak Ojibwe to you and your mom speaks Arabic to you, you would select both languages.

3. What is your cultural or ethnic background? (Please print in the box. You can print more than one.)
   An ethnic group is a group of people who see each other as having similarities, such as traditions, country of origin, history, language, religion, society and culture. Your ethnicity/culture is always based on where you were born or where you live.
   You may use the examples listed below the box to help you. For example, if you participate in Nigerian traditions passed down from your mother and Jamaican traditions passed down from your father, you would write both backgrounds.

4. Do you identify as First Nations (Status or non-Status), Métis, and/or Inuit? (Select all that apply)
   This question refers to Indigenous people of Canada who have ancestors who lived here for thousands of years before the first explorers arrived.

5. Which of the following best describes your racial background? (Select all that apply)
   Race refers to the way society organizes people into groups, based on how you look. Race does not have to be related to your country of origin. The examples provided are simply a guide. Choose your racial background based on how you self-identify.
   If you have a mixed racial background, you can select more than one. For example, if your mom is Black and your dad is White, you would select both.
Social media campaign

To further engage families, students and staff, a social media campaign, #CountMEinPeel, was launched on the district’s Facebook, Twitter and Instagram channels. The campaign began when notification letters were sent home to families (October 2018) and concluded in December 2018. The campaign promoted the census and encouraged participation during Student Census Weeks using consistent key messages, videos and the campaign logo. Below are some sample tweets and posts from the campaign.

Facebook
Twitter

Peel District School Board @PeelSchools 16 Oct 2018

In November, we will launch our first board-wide Student Census—a way for us to better understand the needs of Peel students & their families. Parents—we will be going home this week with more details. We’ll be sharing more information over the next few days! #CountMeInPeel

Peel District School Board @PeelSchools 16 Oct 2018

ATTN Grades 4-12 parents: If you’ve decided NOT to have your child participate in the Student Census, don’t forget to complete and return the form tomorrow.

Peel District School Board @PeelSchools 16 Oct 2018

Thank you #Peelfam for your participation in our first #CountMeInPeel Student Census. Over the next few months, we will scan and analyze all responses to produce a series of research reports to help inform school and board decision-making. Stay tuned for more updates!

Instagram

K-3 Families:
Completed questionnaires are due back to your child's school by Nov. 30.

Student Census Count Me In Peel

Student Census Count Me In Peel

Student Census Count Me In Peel

Student Census Count Me In Peel
The Student Census website, [www.peelschools.org/studentcensus](http://www.peelschools.org/studentcensus), was designed to be easy to navigate, with simple content that could be easily translated. Users could select their language from the drop down menu to view translated materials in the board’s top 20 languages. FAQs were regularly updated with questions received via the Student Census email or phone line.
Internal website for staff

All staff resources were shared on a dedicated Student Census website on the district’s intranet. This page was designed for staff use only, and included additional resources that weren’t available on the external webpage, such as adapted versions of the census and the Educator’s Guide. It was promoted on the homepage of the intranet, and via the Student Census video teleconferences, training resources and email memos. The webpage had a similar design as the external site so that staff would be comfortable navigating both pages with families.
We distributed a news release to media and families prior to the launch of the Student Census. Using key messages, the release’s primary purpose was to evade negative media coverage by clarifying any remaining concerns or questions about the upcoming census.

November 6, 2018

Peel board builds connections with first board-wide Student Census

In November, the Peel District School Board will launch its first board-wide Student Census to gain a better understanding of Peel students to help improve school programming and instruction. Students in grades 4 to 12 will be invited to participate in class during Student Census Weeks (Nov. 19 to 30), while parents/guardians of students in kindergarten to grade 3 will receive a questionnaire to fill out on behalf of their child(ren).

“We are committed to providing the very best learning environments so that all students can achieve personal excellence. To do this, it’s important that we truly understand the needs of students and their families,” says Director of Education Peter Joshua. “The Student Census will provide invaluable insight on student experiences, identity and well-being to help us establish effective programs and reallocate resources to where they are needed most.”

The Student Census questionnaire will take approximately one class period to complete for most students, and will include questions that ask students about themselves and their experiences in and outside of school. Families with students in kindergarten to grade 3 will receive a questionnaire to complete at home with their child(ren) in early November, to be returned by Nov. 30, 2018.

Questionnaires can be viewed at www.peelschools.org/studentcensus. Additional copies of the questionnaires are available in the board’s top 20 languages as well as in adapted form for students with special education needs.

“Our goal is to hear from all students to paint a clearer picture of the communities we serve. The more Student Census responses we receive, the more comprehensive the data will be to help improve programming and instruction,” says Poleen Grewal, associate director of instructional and equity support services. “By learning more about the identity demographics of students and their families, we can better understand, identify and eliminate barriers to student achievement, well-being and inclusion.”

A letter was sent home in mid-October to all Peel families informing them of the upcoming Student Census. Families who do not want their child to participate are asked to return the tear-off form on the letter to their child’s school.

The Peel board is committed to the highest levels of privacy and confidentiality in collecting information about students and follows all privacy requirements outlined in the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA). The Student Census is voluntary and confidential, but it is not anonymous. Completed questionnaires won’t have the student’s name or identification number on it, and will be sealed in an individual envelope to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the responses. Census questionnaires will be labelled with a unique code linked to each student. Once a student completes their census, their responses will be scanned and linked to previously collected data (e.g. attendance, report card grades, graduation rates). Once this scanning has taken place, responses will be de-personalized so that they are no longer tied to a student’s name or identification number.

All scanned responses will be stored in a secure, confidential database and will only be accessed by authorized Peel board research staff to identify and summarize group trends among Peel students. This database will be de-personalized, so individual students cannot be identified. In 2019, a series of reports will be made available to help inform board and school decision-making for programs and instruction.

To learn more and view the Student Census questionnaires, visit www.peelschools.org/studentcensus. Parents/guardians may also email studentcensus@peelsb.com or call 905-890-1010 ext. 3523 if they have any questions.

Media contact: Poleen Grewal, Associate Director of Instructional and Equity Support Services, 905-890-1010 ext. 2232, poleen.grewal@peelsb.com

Reference: Kayla Tishcuff, Senior Communications Officer, 905-890-1010 ext. 2239, kayla.tishcuff@peelsb.com
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS: Evaluation

Social media engagement, #CountMeInPeel

Facebook: 24,000 views, 90 comments, 400 likes
Twitter: 9,496 views, 535 retweets, 500 likes
Instagram: 3,103 views, 250 likes

School social media accounts: Buy-in at the school level was evident by the many tweets and posts on Twitter and Facebook sharing key messages about the Student Census. Below is a sample of the engagement by school social media accounts.

Staff social media accounts: Staff also shared key messages to help raise awareness of the upcoming Student Census in their school communities.
Support on social media: During the Student Census, community parents, staff and parents shared their support of the project on social media.
**Staff and Steering Committee survey results**

School administrators and Steering Committee members were invited to participate in a de-brief survey following the *Student Census* launch. Find a full report of the findings [here](#). The following are some of the comments made by staff:

- “The census was concise and took little time for completion.”
- “It gave students the chance to be heard.”
- “Everyone who participated demonstrated accountability and responsibility to complete the survey.”
- “Positive reception to the idea from staff and students.”
- “No calls, no difficulties expressed through staff at schools.”
- “Easy to locate materials and resources.”
- “The opting out consent worked to ensure that most students were given the census which means the data will be more fulsome.”
- “We appreciated the central meeting (via phone).”
- “Great tool to service our community.”
- “It was delivered to use in a very organized manner; process was smooth.”
- “Teleconference really helped set the tone and get the system on the same page.”
- “The presentation shared helped ensure the whole system got the same message.”
- “The Educator’s Guide was well laid out, with simple, easy to implement instructions.”
- “The guide provided consistency of implementation procedures across our school.”
- “Very smoothly in the junior/intermediate grades, teachers followed the guide as directed.”
- “The availability and quick reference to resources was excellent.”

**Positive media coverage**

Toronto Star: [New head of Peel school board vows to support marginalized students](#)

Education News Canada: [Peel board builds connections with first student census](#)

Toronto Star: [Peel school board launches plan to support black male students](#)

Mississauga News: [Student census coming to Peel board, data on race, sexual orientation could be collected](#)

Toronto Star: [Peel school board plans to collect race-based data on students](#)

Toronto Star: [Schools must collect more race-based data on students, report urges](#)