

Long-form census data key for schools ^[1]

Author: Stewart, Jeanette

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EXCERPTS

School administrators say it could become difficult to deliver programs ranging from child care to ESL supports without accurate census data.

The group representing the province's school boards is speaking out about the need for reliable census information to inform their programming.

"Boards of education depend on a number of data sources when we're making decisions, and we look to sources that are reliable, consistent, can provide trends, have a good reputation within the larger research community and within the public as well. Statistics Canada is one of those agencies," said Sandi Urban-Hall, president of the Saskatchewan School Board Association (SSBA).

On Tuesday, the SSBA lent its dissenting voice to the hundreds of organizations decrying the federal government's decision to eliminate the mandatory long-form census in 2011 and move toward a voluntary survey.

Statistics Canada currently gleans much of its information from the mandatory long-form census distributed to 20 per cent of Canadian households.

This data in turn provides school administrators information about what extra supports are needed for students, by measures such as what resources a family or community has.

"It might be violence prevention, it might be reading, because you have a community that doesn't have the same resources around literacy," she said.

Urban-Hall says all jurisdictions that provide services directly to community and families will feel the effect of a lack of data.

Both Quebec and Ontario's school board associations have spoken out about their concerns.

"It's a case, I think, where more voices send a stronger message," said Urban-Hall. "I would hope to ensure that they would have consistent, reliable data going forward."

The boards will have to create or find another way to gather data about who they are educating, prompting concern about a lack of consistency in data. Changing the way the information is gathered will also make it difficult to track whether existing programs are working, she says.

"It's the same as if you've got a child in school and you're measuring how they're doing with reading. if you change the way you're measuring it ... you don't know if the child has improved or become more challenged," she said.

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-reprinted from the Star Phoenix

Region: Saskatchewan ^[2]

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