

Volume I

National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES)
2017 Web Test Debriefing Interviews for Parents of
Homeschoolers

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Justification

The National Household Education Survey (NHES) is a data collection program of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) aimed at providing descriptive data on the educational activities of the U.S. population, with an emphasis on topics that are appropriate for household surveys rather than institutional surveys. Such topics have covered a wide range of issues, including early childhood care and education, children's readiness for school, parents' perceptions of school safety and discipline, before- and after-school activities of school-age children, participation in adult and career education, parents' involvement in their children's education, school choice, homeschooling, and civic involvement. NHES uses a two-stage design in which sampled households complete a screener questionnaire to enumerate household members and their key characteristics. Within-household sampling from the screener data determines which household member receives which topical survey. NHES typically fields 2 to 3 topical surveys at a time, although the number has varied across its administrations. Surveys are administered in English and in Spanish.

Beginning in 1991, NHES was administered roughly every other year as a landline random-digit-dial (RDD) survey. During a period of declining response rates in all RDD surveys, NCES decided to conduct a series of field tests to determine if a change to self-administered mailed questionnaires would improve response rates. After a 5-year hiatus in data collection for this developmental work, NCES conducted the first full-scale mail-out administration with NHES:2012, which included the Early Childhood Program Participation (ECP) and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education (PFI) surveys. The same two surveys, along with the Adult Training and Education Survey (ATES), were fielded in NHES:2016. In 2019, the NHES will field the PFI and ECP surveys along with the second administration of the ATES. This will be a two-stage study. In the first stage, households will be screened to determine if they contain eligible members. If eligible members are in the household, within-household sampling will be performed. Finally, topical surveys will be administered to the selected household members.

The PFI, previously conducted in 1996, 2003, 2007, 2012, and 2016, surveys families of children and youth enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade or homeschooled for these grades, with an age limit of 20 years, and addresses specific ways that families are involved in their children's school; school practices to involve and support families; involvement with children's homework; and involvement in education activities outside of school. Parents of homeschoolers are asked about their reasons for choosing homeschooling and resources they used in homeschooling. Information about child, parent, and household characteristics is also collected. To minimize response burden and potential respondent confusion, both enrolled and homeschool versions of the PFI questionnaire were created for self-administration.

The ECP, previously conducted in 1991, 1995, 2001, 2005, 2012 and 2016, surveys families of children ages 6 or younger who are not yet enrolled in kindergarten and provides estimates of children's participation in care by relatives and non-relatives in private homes and in center-based daycare or preschool programs (including Head Start and Early Head Start). Additional topics addressed in ECP interviews have included family learning activities; out-of-pocket expenses for nonparental care; continuity of care; factors related to parental selection of care; parents' perceptions of care quality; child health and disability; and child, parent, and household characteristics.

The ATES, previously conducted in 2016, surveys adults ages 16 to 65 who are out of high school and provides new measures of adults' educational and occupational credentials. It identifies adults who have educational certificates, including the subject field of the certificate, its perceived labor market value, and its role in preparing for occupational credentialing; and counts adults who have an occupational certification or license, including the number of such credentials, type of work they are for, their perceived labor market value, and the role of education in preparing for these occupational credentials. To get a comprehensive picture of adult education and training, the survey also includes brief sections on adult participation in work experience programs (such as apprenticeships) and college classes.

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While enrollment in traditional, brick-and-mortar public and private schools is the dominant arrangement for formal education in the United States, other schooling arrangements, such as homeschooling and virtual schooling, also contribute to the education of the nation's youth. Further, recent expansion in virtual schooling and the comingling of homeschooling and virtual schooling necessitate a renewed examination of these education models along a number of dimensions, including: motivations for opting out of brick-and-mortar schools; populations of students served; patterns of teaching, learning, curriculum, and assessments; policy issues; and outcomes for students. Currently, research about homeschooling and virtual schooling faces several challenges. For example, it is difficult to study homeschooling and virtual schooling due to limited administrative data available on these topics and due to the overlap among the schooling options.

In preparation for NHES:2019, NCES was approved in August and December 2016 (OMB# 1850-0803 v.163 and 182, respectively) to test in 2017 (a) a web data collection instrument to explore the feasibility of moving forward with web as the primary mode of data collection in NHES; (b) the sampling of up to two household members for topical questionnaires (dual household sampling); and (c) conduct a targeted incentive experiment, three experiments related to data collection procedures, and a split-panel experiment of ATE survey item wording.

One of the enhanced features being tested in the 2017 NHES Web Test is the ability to “switch” topical questionnaire eligibility on-the-fly. For example, a screener respondent who reports that there are two adults who are not in school and two children who are homeschooled will likely be asked to complete a topical survey about a homeschooled child. If the respondent then indicates that the child is in school for 40 hours, the instrument will “switch” the respondent to the PFI-Enrolled questionnaire.

This request is to conduct debriefing interviews at the end of the 2017 NHES Web Test to gain greater insight about respondents whose survey responses indicated some mismatch between homeschool status and brick-and-mortar enrollment. The debriefing interviews are designed to understand the true schooling experiences of these students and how and why the survey succeeded or failed in capturing the students' schooling context accurately. The debriefing interviews will provide information that will assist NCES in crafting screening items for NHES:2019 that will more accurately guide respondents to the topical questionnaire that is appropriate for their education situation and topical items that correctly capture the details of that education.

Design

The debriefing interview will explore experiences parents had with the 2017 NHES web instrument particularly in regards to breaking off and to switching from one set of topical questions to the other. The interviews will be conducted using staff experienced with qualitative interviewing techniques, open-ended probes, and semi-structured interview protocols. The interviews will be conducted by phone or in-person where possible. The protocol for the debriefing interviews is included in Attachment 2. If participants consent, the interviews will be audio recorded for the purposes of summarizing the results. Any materials that are generated during the interviews will be captured and incorporated into the results as well. A total of 12 debriefing interviews will be conducted.

Recruiting and Paying Respondents

NCES will provide 2017 NHES Web Test data files to Sanametrix on a bi-weekly basis. Project staff will analyze these data to identify potential debriefing interview respondents. Data files will be made available February through August 2017 during the length of the NHES:17 Web Test data collection.

Web Test participants identified as eligible for the debriefing interviews will be recruited by the qualitative interviewing staff of Sanametrix and Activate Research. Using the interviewing staff for recruitment will create a single point-of-contact for the participants. This single point-of-contact will

foster a relationship between the participant and interviewer that should result in a higher quality interview and a lower rate of cancellations and no-shows.

The contact information available on the data file provided by NCES will vary to some extent from respondent to respondent. This will require employing a varied recruitment strategy. All records on the data file will have a mailing address, some may also have an email address, and some may have a phone number.

Phone Recruitment. Recruitment is generally most successful on the phone and allows for possibly conducting the interview directly after recruitment. Phone recruitment will be the preferred method of recruiting participants. We will attempt up to five times over the course of two weeks (business days only) to reach a potential participant by phone. Repeated attempts to contact a participant by phone are necessary as the phone number provided in the data file may not be good or the participant may not be available at the time of the call. After the fifth phone attempt, we will convert the potential participant to an email recruitment (see below).

Email Recruitment. If phone recruitment is unsuccessful or unavailable, we will determine if an email address is available. If an email address is available for the potential participant, we will send up to five emails over the course of two weeks (business days only). Repeated attempts to contact a participant by email are necessary in case our email bounces back, gets filtered as spam, is missed by the respondent, or is ignored by the respondent. After the fifth email attempt, we will convert the potential participant to a postal recruitment (see below).

Postal Recruitment. If both phone and email recruitment are unsuccessful or phone/email contact unavailable, then postal recruitment will be used. Each respondent in the data file provided by NCES will contain a valid postal mailing address. We will send up to two letters using the U.S. Postal Service over the course of two weeks. If no response is obtained by the end of the third week, a final recruitment letter will be sent via FedEx as a last attempt to recruit the participant.

In-person interviews with participants will be suggested during recruitment in case in which the interviewer is geographically close to the participant. In such cases, interviewers will travel to the participant's location. However, statistically, the probability that an interviewer resides within a reasonable travel distance of an NHES Web Test respondent who homeschools and who either switched between the PFI-Enrolled and PFI-Homeschooled instrument or broke off from the instrument before completion and is willing to participate in a debriefing interview, is rare. There may be no cases that satisfy these criteria.

In general, the population we are attempting to recruit for the debriefing is very rare. Only a very small fraction of the respondents participating in the 2017 NHES Web Test is expected to qualify for a debriefing interview. Thus, further screening, other than the verification of speaking with the correct individual, of those recruited will not occur. Participants who agree to be included in the debriefing interviews will be read the Informed Consent statement (Attachment 1) and then begin the interview (Attachment 2). Copies of the phone, email, and postal recruitment materials along with the informed consent statement are included in Attachment 1 of this submission.

In order to try to recruit the desired 12 participants and to thank them for their time and for completing the debriefing interview, each participant will be offered \$25.

Assurance of Confidentiality

Participation is voluntary. The interviewer will read an informed consent statement and obtain verbal consent before interviews are conducted. The informed consent statement is provided in Attachment 1. No personally identifiable information will be maintained after the debriefing interview analyses are completed. The interviews will be audio recorded. The recorded files will be secured for the duration of the study – with access limited to key Sanametrix project staff – and will be destroyed after the final report is completed.

Estimate of Hour Burden

We expect each debriefing interview to last approximately 40 minutes. Recruiting participants will require 10 minutes per potential participant. We anticipate it will require 7 recruitment attempts per eligible participant (thus an estimated 84 attempts to yield 12 participants). This will result in an estimated total of 22 hours of respondent burden for this study.

Table 1. Estimated response burden for NHES 2017 Web Test Debriefing Interviews for Parents of Homeschoolers

Respondents	Number of Respondents	Number of Responses	Burden Hours per Respondent	Total Burden Hours
Recruitment	84	84	0.1667	14
Debriefing Interviews	12	12	0.6667	8
Total	84	96	-	22

Estimate of Cost Burden

There is no direct cost to respondents.

Project Schedule

The project schedule calls for recruitment to begin as soon as each eligible participant is identified from the NHES 2017 Web Test data files (delivery of which will begin in February 2017). The interviews are expected to be completed by August 2017.

Cost to the Federal Government

The cost to the federal government for this focus group study is approximately \$107,174.