

Public Comments Received During the 60-day Comment Period

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High School and Beyond 2020 (HS&B:20) Base-Year Full-Scale Study Recruitment and Field Test

ED-2019-ICCD-0027 Comment on FR Doc # 2019-05117

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As a public servant, higher education admissions professional, and current graduate student I submit this public comment in support of the High School and Beyond 2020 (HS&B:20) Base-Year Full-Scale Study Field Test. According to the Federal Registers abstract, the High School and Beyond 2020 study (HS &B: 20) will be the sixth in a series of longitudinal studies at the high school level conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), within the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education. The NCES secondary longitudinal studies examine issues such as students readiness for high school; the risk factors associated with dropping out of high school; high school completion; the transition into postsecondary education and access/choice of institution; the shift from school to work; and the pipeline into science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

The study informs educational policy by tracking long-term trends and elucidating relationships among students, family, and school characteristics and experiences. Essentially, this information is necessary to the proper functions of the Department of Education and should be moved forward. This study was originally started in the early 1980s and was very helpful in tracking students progress through school.

In todays culture, there are many barriers to students obtaining a form of higher education. From a lack of financial security and aid, to access to counseling for higher educational institutions, studies like this are able to define issues that affect students and their families. Recently, the current Trump administration has made cuts to educational funding (i.e. Pell Grant) opportunities for students. This project cannot be one of the defunded projects and activities and should remain a priority for the agency to inform them on students. Though the longitudinal study may cost money and resource to fund, the benefits outweigh the costs of investing in data. Because the last study done is from the 1980s and 1990s, we need to stay engaged in current trends.

In high school, I was not able to gain access to college counseling and I did not have a pathway into higher education. I was very uneducated when it came to applying to college as my parents did not know the process. Part of the reason why I became a college admissions professional is because of my background and knowing that students in the United States also had the same barriers that I faced as a first-generation college student. Studies like these educate the agency on issues that students face. We need to protect studies like these.

Educational policy today effects our future. The Department of Education with this study should process this information in a timely manner, information is available at faster speeds than in the past, and we now have tools that can analyze these results quickly. The information in this study is necessary to the proper functions of the Department. The Department of Education will be able to use this information to inform itself and others where funding is needed and the right problems to attack.

One of the issues that was found in the old study regarding data, was that underrepresented minority students responded at a lower rate. I hope that the Department targets school districts and keeps representation balanced across different types of schools and school districts as students across America have different experiences. Survey results should try to address several different areas of need. The survey will also need to be accessible in different formats if students do not have internet access. The survey should also capture parental involvement. The amount of burden hours can be lessened if students are able to access these surveys at school or during lunch.

Social media is also a tool that the Department of Education should be able to utilize in this study. Many parents today

use Facebook as a way to communicate with their child. Students should also be able to access the survey through social media platforms like Snapchat or Instagram. There are many ways to distribute and make the survey more accessible to survey takers.

A topic of concern for all parties is financial literacy. High school students today tend to be more debt averse than their millennial counterparts. The study should include questions about students financial literacy and plans to pay for college. Parents should also be surveyed on their preparedness of their students entering into college and how to pay for it as well. I also believe that there should be a section on diversity and adversity in the survey.

Funding for these projects are important. Surveys like this are important for us to reflect on what the Department of Education can do better for its constituents. It is also a medium to stay informed.

Dear Mr. Franco,

Thank you for your interest in and support for the High School and Beyond:2020 Longitudinal Study (HS&B:20). You raise some very important points and your concerns are noted.

One concern is about school district representation and ensuring balance across different types of schools. The plan for data collection is to achieve such a balance. We will select a nationally representative sample of schools with 9th grade, from which a nationally representative sample of 9th-grade students will be selected. As part of this process, schools with different locales (e.g., urban, rural, etc.) and of different types (e.g., public, private) will be selected. Additionally, the sampling of students within schools will be carefully monitored to assure that students of different backgrounds are included in sufficient numbers to be representative of those groups in the population.

Another concern you express is about accessibility for our respondents. We agree that minimizing burden for students, their families, and their schools is a concern and we have made it a focus of our study design. We will collect information from students in ways that do not overly limit access, be it due to internet access or other factors. The primary way in which information will be collected from students is through their participation in an HS&B:20 student session conducted at their school. During this session, study field staff will provide all materials necessary to complete the study activities, including computers for each student to use to complete the survey. While use of social media platforms is not feasible due to the security features we must put in place to protect the privacy of our sample members and assure the integrity of the data we collect, we do take utmost care in ensuring accessibility for our study participants. This may include flexible but secure survey methods such as online portals for students taking the survey outside of school.

Another topic of concern in your letter is about survey content. You highlight several topics that are already integral parts of the study and are considered for future data collections as well (e.g., financial literacy, plans to pay for college). For example, we plan to ask parents in the field test about their family's plans to help their child pay for college. Parental involvement is a key topic in several questionnaires. Expert research advisors have also noted concerns about diversity and adversity, and plans are being made to test questions about these topics at the school level.

Thank you very much for your support of the study moving forward.

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