

April 20, 2020

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Robert Sivinski, OMB  
**From:** Deanne Swan, NCES  
**Through:** Carrie Clarady, Avar Consulting, in contract to NCES  
**Re:** School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) 2018 and 2020 – SSOCS 2020 Communication Change Request (OMB# 1850-0761 v.19)

The School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) is a nationally representative survey of elementary and secondary school principals that serves as the primary source of school-level data on crime and safety in public schools. SSOCS is the only recurring federal survey collecting detailed information on the incidence, frequency, seriousness, and nature of violence affecting students and school personnel from the school's perspective. Data are also collected on frequency and types of disciplinary actions taken for select offenses; perceptions of other disciplinary problems, such as bullying, verbal abuse and disorder in the classroom; the presence and role of school security staff; parent and community involvement; staff training; mental health services available to students; and, school policies and programs concerning crime and safety. Prior administrations of SSOCS were conducted in 2000, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2016, and 2018. The 2018 and 2020 SSOCS full-scale data collections were approved in July 2017 with the latest update approved in March 2020 (OMB# 1850-0761 v.12-18).

This submission provides updated versions of the SSOCS 2020 communications materials and focuses on two changes: (a) a change in the contact schedule, and (b) an update to the incentive structure. These changes result in no changes to participant burden or cost to the federal government.

As in the changes in v. 18, these changes to the communication materials and schedules of respondent outreach are due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, which has resulted in the closing of schools and a temporary discontinuation of operations at the Census Bureau's National Processing Center (NPC). These changes are also in response to the current response rate for the SSOCS, which is presently at 30 percent, well below NCES reporting standards. Because of the widespread closure of school buildings and shift to online learning, many of the targeted respondents to SSOCS (public school principals) are experiencing extraordinary demands on their time. With the halt of mailout operations at NPC, our mail packages can no longer be sent as originally planned, and even if they could be sent as planned the high rate of building closures for public schools mean that the packages would not be received. It is critical that our communications reach our respondents through the most accessible medium – e-mail – and in a manner that allows them to provide responses via a web portal before the school year ends, which for most schools is May and June. This has required a drastic shift in the communication strategy for the remainder of the SSOCS requests for response, moving not only from mail to e-mail for our communication with respondents, but also to push responses to the web portal. Because of the cessation of operations at NPC, the incentive test as originally planned, with prepaid incentives sent in mail packages, must be restructured to adapt to the present circumstances. The original planned offer of pre-paid incentives provided in mail packages will be restructured to a contingent incentive offered in e-mail and to be fulfilled at a later date when NPC is operational.

One strategy to adjust for these changes in the environment to send more email reminders to request for a response via the online instrument and to cancel and to delay paper questionnaire mailouts to a later date; these are the adjustments we're making in the contact schedule. Because of the changes from mail to e-mail, our planned test of pre-paid incentives also must be adjusted for the current environment. Because we can no longer offer a non-contingent incentive (i.e., prepaid in the mail package) due to the cessation of NPC mailout operations and the closure of school buildings across the nation, we plan to take the same incentive pool originally approved and convert it to a contingent incentive offered through e-mail (i.e., fulfilled after response once NPC mail operations are operational). With this change to a contingent incentive offer, we have data about each of the schools from the Common Core of Data (CCD), so we will still be able to look at how the non-responders were at the beginning of the e-mail incentive campaign and compare them to the responders to determine whether there is a difference in the types of schools with which the contingent incentive was effective. Although this will be a quasi-experimental design rather than a true experiment as originally planned, it will still provide us with valuable information for future SSOCS data collections. We hope this restructured incentive will have a positive effect on the response rate. It is critical that we raise the response rate in order to have publishable data. This survey provides data that helps policy offices determine grant funding priorities around school safety issues, including pandemic planning. In a recent blog post, we used SSOCS data to show that 46 percent of public schools in school year 2017-18 reported that they had a written plan for procedures to be performed in the event of pandemic disease (<https://nces.ed.gov/blogs/nces/post/the-prevalence-of-written-plans-for-a-pandemic-disease-scenario-in-public-schools>).

Part A has been updated to reflect a new additions to the communication strategy and a change in the use of the incentive offer, and Appendix A has been updated to reflect new dates for emails and packages to be sent, to add two additional emails to be sent throughout data collection, a revised thank you fulfillment letter to be sent after data collection, and to change the incentive originally offered as a pre-paid incentive in a physical mailout to a promised incentive offered in an email.

The noteworthy changes to the approved materials are listed below. Text added since the last approved version of each document is marked in burgundy font color, all text deleted since the last approved version is marked in crossed-out burgundy font color, and all unchanged text is shown in black font.

## **The follow updates were made to [Part A](#):**

### **Section A. Justification. (p. 1)**

The request to conduct the 2018 and 2020 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) was approved in July 2017 with the latest update approved in ~~September 2019~~ **March 2020** (OMB# 1850-0761 v.12-18). This latest submission provides updated versions of the SSOCS 2020 communications materials and new schedules for respondent outreach, changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak which has resulted in the closing of schools and a temporary discontinuation of mailout operations. Appendix A has been updated to reflect new dates for emails and packages to be sent, as well as adding two additional emails to be sent throughout data collection.

### **A.9. Provision of Payments or Gifts to Respondents (p. 8-9)**

Some districts charge a fee (~\$50-200) to process research application requests, which will be paid as

necessary. In addition to the web test, SSOCS:2018 will include an incentive experiment designed to examine the effectiveness of offering principals a monetary incentive to boost the overall response rate. ~~Schools~~Some schools in the experimental treatment will receive a \$10 prepaid incentive ~~gift card~~ at the first contact by mail. This treatment will be evaluated against the ~~control group, which~~ remainder of respondents, who will ~~not~~ receive ~~any~~ a \$10 promised incentive offered via email.

SSOCS:2020 will build on the SSOCS:2018 incentive experiment ~~and will include two incentive treatment groups.~~ Because of the emergent situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the closure of many school buildings across the nation, the test and the overall contact strategy has adjusted to adapt to the new environment. In addition, the closure of the Census Bureau National Processing Center has required the removal or delay of physical mail packages, resulting in the need to push response to the online portal. Schools in the “early incentive” treatment group ~~will receive~~received a \$10 cash incentive at the first contact by mail. ~~Schools~~, which was mailed in February 2020. Beginning with the “~~delayed incentive~~” treatment ~~group will not receive an incentive~~reminder emails sent in the first two mail contacts ~~but~~mid-April 2020, all schools will receive a promise of a \$10 cash incentive ~~during the third mail contact.~~ Both treatment groups, which will be fulfilled in August with the Thank You letters sent to participating principals after the close of data collection. The “early incentive” treatment group can be evaluated against the ~~control group~~rest of the respondents, ~~which~~ who will ~~not~~ receive ~~any~~ a post-response incentive through email. The goal of this experiment is to further refine the SSOCS incentive strategy by comparing response rates, indicators of nonresponse bias, and data collection costs between the early ~~and delayed~~prepaid incentive and the email ~~post-response~~ incentive strategies, ~~relative to a no-incentive control.~~ In addition, the use of the incentive is to enhance the response rate of the overall study in a strained environment.

## **A.12. Estimates of Burden for Information Collection**

### **SSOCS:2020 (p. 12)**

SSOCS:2018 yielded an unweighted response rate of approximately 58 percent. When the responding schools were weighted to account for their original sampling probabilities, the response rate increased to approximately 62 percent. As in the prior collections, the objectives of the SSOCS:2020 sample design are twofold: to obtain overall cross-sectional and subgroup estimates of important indicators of school crime and safety and to develop precise estimates of change in various characteristics relating to crime between the SSOCS administrations. To attain these objectives and taking into consideration the low response rates in the 2016 and 2018 collections, approximately 4,800 total schools will be drawn in the sample: 2,340 schools will be assigned to the “early incentive” treatment; ~~1,230 schools will be assigned to the “delayed incentive” treatment; and 1,230 schools will be assigned to the “no incentive” (control) treatment.~~the remaining 2,460 schools will be assigned to the “email promised incentive” treatment. Because of the strained data collection environment that has resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, which includes the closure of many schools across the nation and the closure of the Census Bureau’s National Processing Center (NPC), the contact strategy will be shifted to predominantly email packages encouraging data submission through the web portal. In order to encourage response at a time when resources of respondents are strained, the ~~delayed incentives will be offered to all respondents.~~ Given the inclusion of both web menu and incentive experiments aimed at increasing the overall response, we anticipate at least maintaining the SSOCS:2016 and SSOCS:2018 response rates, which will yield more completed surveys than needed to meet the study’s objectives.

**The following updates were made to [Appendix A – SSOCS 2018 & SSOCS 2020 Communication Materials](#)**

**The final versions of contact materials for SSOCS:2020 are provided on pp. 77-90.**

**Summary of Changed Timeline for Mailings (Physical and E-mail) for 2020 SSOCS**

- Elimination of physical mailing (previously 3<sup>rd</sup> package) because of closure of Census Bureau's National Processing Center (NPC)
- Rescheduling of physical mailing (previously 4<sup>th</sup> package, now 3<sup>rd</sup> package) to 3 weeks after the opening of NPC. If the NPC does not open by the week of May 4, this package will be eliminated, as it will not get to schools in a timely manner.
- Addition of Follow-up E-mail on 04/21/2020
- Revision of Follow-up E-mail on 04/30/2020
- Revision of Follow-up E-mail on 05/07/2020
- Addition of Follow-up E-mail on 05/15/2020
- Revision of Follow-up E-mail on 05/26/2020
- Addition of Thank You Fulfillment Letter to Principals on August 2020

**Eliminate Planned Mailing with Paper Questionnaire and Delayed Prepaid Incentive, originally planned for April 2020 (Originally SSOCS 15L(WI) and SSOCS 15L(W))**

Eliminated the two letters associated with this mailing (see pp. 5-6 of this memo)

**Changed Date for Planned Mailing with Paper Questionnaire, originally scheduled for 3 weeks after the now eliminated 3<sup>rd</sup> package. No change to text of letter. (p. 78)**

~~2020 Third Reminder Letter to Principal; 4th Package, Second Questionnaire (to be sent 3 weeks after 3rd package) (Date Updated March 2020)~~

~~SSOCS-16L~~

~~2020 Second Reminder Letter to Principal; 3rd Package, First Questionnaire (to be sent 3 weeks after Census National Processing Center is operational, May 28, 2020) (Updated April 2020)~~

~~SSOCS-16L~~

2020 Second Reminder Letter to Principal; 3<sup>rd</sup> Package—Delayed Incentive (first paper questionnaire) (to be sent 3 weeks after Census National Processing Center is operational) (Date Updated March 2020)  
**SSOCS-15L(WI)**

Dear <insert name>:

We recently sent you an invitation to complete the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) online. SSOCS is the only national study that collects information about crime and safety in public schools. Please accept the enclosed token of our appreciation for your participation in the SSOCS.

According to our records, you have not yet completed the SSOCS questionnaire online. If you have recently completed the online questionnaire, thank you for your participation, and please disregard this letter. If you have not, I encourage you to complete the enclosed questionnaire. We have extended the deadline to <insert date>.

We know that you are very busy and receive many survey requests. However, we urge you to take time to complete this critically important survey. While your decision to participate is voluntary, your response is crucial to understand the state of crime and safety issues in U.S. schools. Data from previous SSOCS surveys has been provided to Congress in relation to education funding and safety priorities. Access to this data greatly enhances capacity for good decision making. Schools will not be identified by name in any reports.

A postage-paid return envelope is enclosed for your convenience. If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact the U.S. Census Bureau at 1-888-595-1332. The U.S. Census Bureau, the survey collection agency, is also available to answer your questions via e-mail at [ssocs@census.gov](mailto:ssocs@census.gov). To learn more about SSOCS, please visit <http://www.nces.ed.gov/surveys/ssocs>.

Sincerely,

James (Lynn) Woodworth, Ph. D.  
Commissioner  
National Center for Education Statistics  
U.S. Department of Education

Enclosures  
2020 SSOCS Questionnaire

NCES is authorized to conduct this survey by the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA 2002, 20 U.S.C. §9543). All of the information you provide may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose except as required by law (20 U.S.C. §9573 and 6 U.S.C. §151). Reports of the findings from the survey will not identify participating districts, schools, or staff. Individual responses will be combined with those from other participants to produce summary statistics and reports.

~~2020 Second Reminder Letter to Principal; 3<sup>rd</sup> Package—No Incentive (first paper questionnaire) (to be sent 3 weeks after Census National Processing Center is operational) (Date updated March 2020)~~

~~SSOCS-15L(W)~~

Dear <PRINCIPAL>:

~~We recently sent you an invitation to complete the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) online. SSOCS is the only national study that collects information about crime and safety in public schools.~~

~~According to our records, you have not yet completed the SSOCS questionnaire online. If you have recently completed the online questionnaire, thank you for your participation, and please disregard this letter. If you have not, I encourage you to complete the enclosed questionnaire. We have extended the deadline to <insert date>.~~

~~We know that you are very busy and receive many survey requests. However, we urge you to take time to complete this very important survey. While your decision to participate is voluntary, your response is crucial to understand the state of crime and safety issues in U.S. schools. Schools will not be identified by name in any reports.~~

~~A postage-paid return envelope is enclosed for your convenience. If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact the U.S. Census Bureau at 1-888-595-1332. The U.S. Census Bureau, the survey collection agency, is also available to answer your questions via e-mail at [ssocs@census.gov](mailto:ssocs@census.gov). To learn more about SSOCS, please~~

~~James (Lynn) Woodworth, Ph. D.  
EnclosuresSSOCS Questionnaire~~

~~NCES is authorized to conduct this survey by the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA 2002, 20 U.S.C. §9543). All of the information you provide may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose except as required by law (20 U.S.C. §9573 and 6 U.S.C. §151). Reports of the findings from the survey will not identify participating districts, schools, or staff.~~

**Addition of Follow-up E-mail with Incentive offer on 04/21/2020 (p. 84)**

**2020 follow-up e-mail (April 21, 2020) (updated April 2020)  
(Reminder email to all principals – All Treatments)**

Subject line: We Need Your Input! U.S. Department of Education Survey Reminder

Dear <PRINCIPAL>:

During this time of uncertainty, we appreciate your help with providing information about what is going on in your school. Your responses to the 2020 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) help the policy and program offices at the U.S. Department of Education design grant programs intended to address school safety, violence prevention, and school climate.

If you haven't had the opportunity to log on and complete the survey yet, we encourage you to do so now by clicking the link below. Your survey responses will be collected on a secure website.

**Respond now at <https://respond.census.gov/ssocs>**

**Log in using this User ID: <USERID>**

As a token of our appreciation for taking the time to complete our survey with so many other things going on right now, we will mail you \$10 this summer at the conclusion of the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS).

Your completed questionnaire will provide the nation accurate statistics on school crime and safety for the 2019–20 school year. Please note that reports of the findings from the survey will not identify schools by name. Individual responses will be combined with those from other participants to produce summary statistics and reports.

You may call with any questions or may complete the survey over the phone by calling the U.S. Census Bureau at 1–888–595–1332 or via e-mail at [ssocs@census.gov](mailto:ssocs@census.gov). To learn more about SSOCS, visit <http://www.nces.ed.gov/surveys/ssocs>.

Sincerely,

James (Lynn) Woodworth, Ph.D.  
Commissioner  
National Center for Education Statistics  
U.S. Department of Education

## Revision of Follow-up E-mail with Incentive Offer on 04/30/2020

~~2020 Fourth follow-up e-mail (04/30/20) (updated September 2019)~~

2020 follow-up e-mail (April 30, 2020) (updated April 2020)  
(Reminder email to all principals – All Treatments)

Subject line: **There is Still Time!** U.S. Department of Education Survey Reminder

Dear <PRINCIPAL>:

We are living through a difficult time, characterized by many changes for educators and students. We need your help completing the 2020 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), a federal survey that gathers statistics on programs and practices implemented across our nation to provide a safe school environment.

If you haven't had the opportunity to log on and complete the survey yet, we encourage you to do so. Your survey responses will be collected on a secure website.

~~There is still time for your school to participate in the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS). SSOCS produces valuable data on crime and safety in public schools.~~

~~If you have already completed and returned your questionnaire, thank you! If not, please complete and return it as soon as possible. You may also respond now by clicking on the link below.~~

**Respond now at <https://respond.census.gov/ssocs>**

**Log in using this User ID: <USERID>**

As a token of our appreciation for taking the time to complete the survey we will mail you \$10 this summer at the conclusion of the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS).

Please note that reports of the findings from the survey will not identify schools by name. Individual responses will be combined with those from other participants to produce summary statistics and reports.

If you have any questions contact the U.S. Census Bureau, the survey collection agency, by phone at 1-888-595-1332 or via e-mail at [ssocs@census.gov](mailto:ssocs@census.gov). To learn more about SSOCS, visit <http://www.nces.ed.gov/surveys/ssocs>.

Sincerely,

James (Lynn) Woodworth, Ph.D.  
Commissioner  
National Center for Education Statistics  
U.S. Department of Education

**Revision of E-mail Follow-up with Incentive Offer on 05/07/2020**

**2020 follow-up e-mail (May 07, 2020) (updated April 2020)  
(Reminder email to all principals – All Treatments)**

Subject line: ~~We need your response today-~~ U.S. Department of Education Survey Reminder

Dear <PRINCIPAL>:

There is still time ~~for your school to complete~~ to participate in the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS). ~~SSOCS produces valuable data on crime and safety in public schools.~~ You may respond now by clicking on the link below.

~~If you have already completed and returned your questionnaire, thank you! If not, please complete and return it as soon as possible. You may also respond now by clicking on the link below.~~

**Respond now at <https://respond.census.gov/ssocs>**

**Log in using this User ID: <USERID>**

As a token of our appreciation for taking the time to complete our survey with so many other things going on right now, we will mail you \$10 this summer at the conclusion of the study.

Your completed questionnaire will provide the nation accurate statistics of programs and policies implemented to provide a safe school environment. Please note that reports of the findings from the survey will not identify schools by name. Your survey responses will be collected on a secure website. Individual responses will be combined with those from other participants to produce summary statistics and reports.

If you have any questions contact the U.S. Census Bureau, the survey collection agency, by phone at 1-888-595-1332 or via e-mail at [ssocs@census.gov](mailto:ssocs@census.gov). To learn more about SSOCS, visit <http://www.nces.ed.gov/surveys/ssocs>.

Sincerely,

James (Lynn) Woodworth, Ph.D.  
Commissioner  
National Center for Education Statistics  
U.S. Department of Education

**Addition of E-Mail Follow-up with Incentive Offer on 04/15/2020**

**2020 follow-up e-mail (May 14, 2020) (updated April 2020)  
(Reminder email to all principals – All Treatments)**

Subject line: U.S. Department of Education Survey– Please respond!

Dear <PRINCIPAL>:

Data collection for the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) is coming to a close. Don't miss your opportunity to contribute to data that are used by the U.S. Department of Education's policy and program offices for making policy decisions and designing grant programs intended to address school safety, violence programs, and school climate.

If you have already responded to our survey, thank you! If you have not responded yet, please click on the link below

**Respond now at <https://respond.census.gov/ssocs>**

**Log in using this User ID: <USERID>**

As a token of our appreciation for taking the time to complete the survey, we will mail you \$10 this summer at the conclusion of the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS).

Your survey responses will be collected on a secure website and schools will not be identified by name in any reports. We appreciate your help in this important data collection effort!

SSOCS is conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the U.S. Department of Education and collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. If you have any general questions about the study or if you wish to complete the survey with assistance, please contact the U.S. Census Bureau at 1-888-595-1332 or via e-mail at [ssocs@census.gov](mailto:ssocs@census.gov). To learn more about SSOCS, visit <http://www.nces.ed.gov/surveys/ssocs>.

Sincerely,

James (Lynn) Woodworth, Ph.D.  
Commissioner  
National Center for Education Statistics  
U.S. Department of Education

**Revision to Text of Follow-up E-mail with Incentive Offer on 05/26/2020**

**2020 Follow-up e-mail (May 26, 2020) (updated April 2020)  
(Reminder email to all principals – All Treatments)**

Subject line: U.S. Department of Education Survey – last chance (\$10 incentive)!

Dear <PRINCIPAL>:

Please respond! Data collection for the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) is coming to a close. Don't miss your opportunity to contribute to data that are used by the U.S. Department of Education's policy and program offices for making policy decisions and designing grant programs intended to address school safety, violence programs, and school climate.

If you have already responded to our survey, thank you! If you have not ~~already done so~~ responded yet, please ~~complete and return your SSOCS questionnaire. You may also respond now by clicking~~ click on the link below:

~~Schools~~

**Respond now at <https://respond.census.gov/ssocs>**

**Log in using this User ID: <USERID>**

~~As a token of our appreciation for taking the time to complete the survey, we will mail you \$10 this summer at the conclusion of the School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS).~~

~~Your survey responses will be collected on a secure website and schools will not be identified by name in any reports. We appreciate your help in this important data collection effort!~~

SSOCS is conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the U.S. Department of Education and collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. If you have any general questions about the study or if you wish to complete the survey with assistance, please contact the U.S. Census Bureau at 1-888-595-1332 or via e-mail at [ssocs@census.gov](mailto:ssocs@census.gov). To learn more about SSOCS, visit <http://www.nces.ed.gov/surveys/ssocs>.

Sincerely,

James (Lynn) Woodworth, Ph.D.  
Commissioner  
National Center for Education Statistics  
U.S. Department of Education

## Addition of Thank You Letter Mailing for Fulfillment of Post-Response Incentive

### 2020 Thank You Letter to Principals (August 2020) (Incentive fulfillment) SSOCS-18L

Dear <insert name>:

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education would like to thank you for making the 2020 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) a success! Please accept the enclosed token of our appreciation for your participation in the SSOCS.

SSOCS is the only nationally representative survey that collects data on crime and safety from a principal's perspective, so we appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to represent your school in this important effort. This school year, we were able to gather data from over <insert number> schools. Your participation was crucial in helping us achieve this success.

Please visit <http://ies.ed.gov/newsflash/#nces> and sign up to receive up-to-date alerts about a number of education topics, including crime and safety in schools. Tables based on data from the 2017–18 SSOCS and earlier SSOCS administrations are available on the NCES website. In addition to these data products, tables and reports based on the 2019–20 SSOCS will be posted to our website at <http://www.nces.ed.gov/surveys/ssocs> upon release.

Again, thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

James (Lynn) Woodworth, Ph. D.  
Commissioner  
National Center for Education Statistics  
U.S. Department of Education