



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
National Center for Education Statistics

September 9, 2021

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Bob Sivinski, OMB  
**From:** Rachel Hansen, NCES  
**Through:** Carrie Clarady, NCES  
**Re:** School Pulse Panel Fall 2021 Recruitment Boost Change Request (OMB# 1850-0963 v.5)

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The requested Emergency Clearance for the School Pulse Panel (OMB# 1850-0963 v.4) was approved by OMB in September 2021 and was posted on the Federal Register for public review (the 30D public comment period will expire on October 7, 2021). To date, about 2400 public elementary, middle, high, and combined-grade schools have been selected to participate in a panel where school and district staff will be asked to provide requested data monthly during the 2021-22 school years. It is our goal to collect detailed information on various topics while also assessing changes in reopening efforts over time. Given the high demand for data collection during this time, the content of the survey may change on a quarterly basis. Recruitment for the study began in July and has continued into the month of September. A brief instrument was included in the recruitment effort in order to collect limited information on summer school plans. The monthly data collection is scheduled to begin on September 14, 2021.

The purpose of this Change Request is to add new letters to be mailed to sampled schools in October and November. Additionally, we plan to include a non-monetary token of appreciation of a tote bag in the November mailout. This will be a way to express our appreciation for those that have responded while also drawing attention to the mailed package for those who have yet to respond.

NCES previously requested an emergency clearance to allow us to comply with the January 21, 2021 Executive Order on Supporting the Reopening and Continuing Operation of Schools and Early Childhood Education Providers, which states that the Department of Education must “coordinate with the Director of the Institute of Education Sciences to facilitate, consistent with applicable law, the collection of data necessary to fully understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students and educators, including data on the status of in-person learning. These data shall be disaggregated by student demographics, including race, ethnicity, disability, English-language-learner status, and free or reduced lunch status or other appropriate indicators of family income.” The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in the Institute of Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education, will oversee the survey collection, which is designed to collect vital data with the least possible burden on schools. With the voluntary participation of educators and school leaders across the country, NCES will be able to report the percentages of students who received instruction remotely, in-person, or in a hybrid instructional mode for selected districts, states, and the nation. NCES will provide these data for various student groups, in addition to information about attendance rates, in an online dashboard.

The costs to the government have not changed as a result of this amendment, but because our current response rate is low, we are considering these physical letter mailings and a non-monetary incentive as additional recruitment efforts to try to bring attention to the study and boost participation. In addition to the changes mentioned above, detailed summaries of the changes to the supporting documents are below and across following pages.

## **Part A**

### **A.1.4 Study Design**

The U.S. Census Bureau will collect the School Pulse Panel data on behalf of NCES. The School Pulse Panel will be a self-administered, online survey (as built in Qualtrics). It is estimated for the survey to require a total of about 2-3 hours of staff time.

The sampled school will be offered up to a total reimbursement of \$5,000 for their participation in the study over the course of 12 months (including September 2021 through August 2022). The reimbursement will be paid out quarterly in the form of a debit card and will be prorated to include the dollar amount that reflects the number of months of participation for that quarter. **Additionally, a non-monetary incentive (tote bag) will be sent to sampled schools as part of the November communications.** If a school district does not permit its schools to receive any form of **payment-incentive**, the reimbursement will be sent to a point of contact in the district or the reimbursement **and any non-monetary incentives** will be withheld. Principals, or the school staff most knowledgeable about COVID-19 impacts on the school environment and instructional offerings, can complete the survey, however it is encouraged for school staff to seek assistance in responding from other school staff or district staff to help reduce burden. No classroom time is involved in the completion of this survey.

### **A.9 Provision of Payments or Gifts to Respondents**

The sampled school will be offered up to a total reimbursement of \$5,000 for their participation in the study over the course of 12 months (including September 2021 through August 2022). The reimbursement will be paid out quarterly in the form of a debit card and will be prorated to include the dollar amount that reflects the number of months of participation for that quarter. **Additionally, a non-monetary incentive (tote bag) will be sent to sampled schools as part of the November communications.** If a school district does not permit its schools to receive any form of **payment-incentive**, the reimbursement will be sent to a point of contact in the district or the reimbursement **and any non-monetary incentives** will be withheld. Principals, or the school staff most knowledgeable about COVID-19 impacts on the school environment and instructional offerings, can complete the survey, however it is encouraged for school staff to seek assistance in responding from other school staff or district staff to help reduce burden. No classroom time is involved in the completion of this survey.

## **Part B**

### **Section B. Methodology**

The U.S. Census Bureau will collect the School Pulse Panel (SPP) data on behalf of NCES. Data collection will be a self-administered, online survey. It is estimated for the survey to require up to 2-3 hours of staff time each month. The sampled school will be offered up to a total reimbursement of \$5,000 for their participation in the study over the course of 12 months (including September 2021 through August 2022). The reimbursement will be paid out quarterly in the form of a debit card and will be prorated to include the dollar amount that reflects the number of months of participation for that quarter. **Additionally, a non-monetary incentive (tote bag) will be included in the November communications.** If a school district does not permit its schools to receive any form of **payment-incentive**, the reimbursement will be sent to a point of contact in the district or the reimbursement **and any non-monetary incentives** will be withheld. Principals, other school staff most knowledgeable about COVID-19 impacts on the school environment and instructional offerings, and district staff can help complete the survey. No classroom time is involved in the completion of this survey.

### **B2. Procedures for the Collection of Information**

#### **School Communication**

The School Pulse Panel will be conducted via a self-administered web-based survey instrument. A clerical operation prior to data collection was conducted to obtain e-mail addresses for all the sampled school principals,

and these e-mails will be used to contact the school principals throughout the data collection. During the recruitment process (cleared in July 2021; last change request approved in August OMB# 1850-0963 v.3), an initial letter was sent via e-mail in July 2021 to notify sampled schools of their selection for the survey, to verify contact information, to inform schools about reimbursements of up to \$5,000 offered to schools over the course of 12 months for their continued participation in the study, and also included a link to a short preliminary summer questionnaire. Reminder e-mails have continued to be sent throughout August 2021. A new invitation e-mail will be sent in September, and each month thereafter, to distribute instructions on how to complete the monthly web questionnaire, including the survey URL to access the survey online (Attachment A). **Physical letters will be sent in October and November in advance of the monthly collections to assist with legitimizing the study and bring attention to the study, in general.**

The sampled school will be offered up to a total reimbursement of \$5,000 for their participation in the study over the course of 12 months (including September 2021 through August 2022). The reimbursement will be paid out quarterly in the form of a debit card and will be prorated to include the dollar amount that reflects the number of months of participation for that quarter. **Additionally, a non-monetary incentive (tote bag) will be included in the November communications.** If a school district does not permit its schools to receive any form of ~~payment~~ incentive, the reimbursement will be sent to a point of contact in the district or the reimbursement **and any non-monetary incentives** will be withheld.

A copy of the **letters and** e-mails to be sent to school principals throughout the SPP data collection are included in appendices A.

### **B3. Methods to Maximize Response Rates**

NCES is committed to obtaining a high response rate in the SPP. In general, a key to achieving a high response rate is to track the response status of each sampled school, with telephone follow-up, as well as follow-up by e-mail, of those schools that do not respond promptly. To help track response status, survey responses will be monitored through an automated receipt control system. Telephone interviews will be conducted only by Census Bureau interviewers who have received training in general telephone interview techniques as well as specific training for SPP.

It is estimated that the survey will require a total of about 2-3 hours of school staff time each month. To encourage study participation, the sampled school will be offered up to a total reimbursement of \$5,000 for their participation in the study over the course of 12 months (including September 2021 through August 2022) **and will be sent a tote bag as a token of appreciation as part of the November mailout.**

## **Appendix A**

**October Advance Letter (Variations of this letter will be sent depending on whether they can accept incentives or not)**

**[Date]**

**Dear Principal,**

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to impact K-12 education in the United States. It is critical for the Department of Education, Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and other Federal agencies to have accurate and up to date information on the operating status of schools. We have selected a small number of schools to represent all schools in the United States as part of a carefully selected panel. Your school was selected to participate in this important panel. Each month during the 2021-22 school year, you will be asked to provide information on the operating status and COVID-19 related protocols at your school.

On October 12th, the US Census Bureau will send you an email invitation (sender: ADDP.School.Pulse.Panel@census.gov) to participate in the **School Pulse Panel**. To learn more about the School Pulse Panel, visit [www.census.gov/schoolpulse](http://www.census.gov/schoolpulse).

**What Is Involved?**

Within the email invitation that you receive is a link to the October survey, which asks about your school's response to the pandemic, including reopening status, virus spread mitigation strategies, services offered for students and staff, and technology use. This email will be sent to:

[principal email address]

**If this is the incorrect email address, please contact the School Pulse Panel staff at 1-844-868-3661 to provide the correct email address.**

Participating schools will be compensated up to **\$5,000** for the year if each survey is completed. Total time to complete the survey is expected to be 2-3 hours each month. You are encouraged to work with district staff to complete the survey. Working with your district will greatly reduce the time it takes to complete the survey. On the back of this letter are specific instructions for accessing and completing the survey. Participation is voluntary.

**What's Next?**

After completing the October survey, you will receive a new survey monthly, through August 2022. You will receive the next survey in an email on Tuesday, November 9. Each survey will focus on various aspects of your school's response to the pandemic.

If you have any questions about the study, contact the U.S. Census Bureau at 1-844-868-3661 or via e-mail at [addp.school.pulse.panel@census.gov](mailto:addp.school.pulse.panel@census.gov). The Census Bureau is collecting the data for NCES.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

**Christopher Chapman**

Associate Commissioner

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

U.S. Department of Education

## **Additional Information About Participating in the School Pulse Panel**

This study is in support of the recent Executive Order on Supporting the Reopening and Continuing Operation of Schools and Early Childhood Education Providers. The School Pulse Panel is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). NCES is a center within the Institute of Education Sciences.

### **Accessing the Survey**

You can access the survey using the unique link that will be emailed to you. The survey does not need to be completed in one sitting. You will have two weeks to complete the survey.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of topics covered in this survey:

- instructional mode offered,
- enrollment counts of subgroups of students using various instructional modes,
- pandemic-related learning needs,
- safe and healthy school mitigation strategies,
- mental health services,
- use of technology, and
- information on staffing.

### **Completing the Survey**

You may not be the most appropriate person to answer every question related to each of these topics. For some topics, such as enrollment and attendance, staff at the district level may be in a better position to respond. You are free (and encouraged) to send the survey link to members of your school and/or district staff to ease the burden of completion. *Please note* that when other staff members access the survey, they will be brought to the introduction page; when you send the link to others, be sure to include which specific questions you want them to answer. These questions are numbered and can be easily accessed using the table of contents, found at the top of each survey page.

### **Compensation**

The school will be offered up to a total reimbursement of \$5,000 for participation in the study over the course of 12 months (this includes September 2021 through August 2022). The reimbursement will be paid out quarterly to the district in the form of a debit card and will be prorated to include the dollar amount that reflects the number of months of participation for that quarter. More information on the delivery of the debit card will come in November.

### **Other Important Information**

All participation is voluntary. There are no penalties for not participating in the study. However, each school in the School Pulse Panel sample was selected to represent schools with similar characteristics, therefore your participation is critical. Please be assured that by federal mandate we are required to protect the responses of all schools included in our survey. Individual responses will be combined with those from other participants to produce summary statistics and reports.

### **Questions?**

If you have any questions about the study, contact the U.S. Census Bureau at 1-844-868-3661 or via e-mail at [addp.school.pulse.panel@census.gov](mailto:addp.school.pulse.panel@census.gov). The Census Bureau is collecting the data for NCES.

*NCES is authorized to conduct this survey by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP 2021; Sec. 2010) and the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA 2002, 20 U.S.C. §9543). All of the information schools 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 Local Education Agencies (LEAs), schools, or staff. Individual responses will be combined with those from other participants to produce summary statistics and reports.*

## November Tote Bags – Participated and allowed to receive incentives

**Dear Principal,**

On behalf of the Department of Education, I want to thank you for your participation in the School Pulse Panel so far. Your school is one of a small number of schools that are providing a monthly snapshot of the operational status of schools during the 2021-22 school year. I have included a tote bag as a token of appreciation for your continued participation in the panel.

On November 9th, the US Census Bureau will send you an email invitation (subject: [email subject]) to participate in the November collection of the **School Pulse Panel**. For more about the School Pulse Panel, visit [www.census.gov/schoolpulse](http://www.census.gov/schoolpulse).

Thank you again for helping to ensure that policy makers at the Department of Education, Centers for Disease Control, and other Federal agencies have accurate, timely data to drive policy decisions and to inform resource allocations to assist with school reopening efforts.

If you have any questions about the study, contact the U.S. Census Bureau at 1-844-868-3661 or via e-mail at [addp.school.pulse.panel@census.gov](mailto:addp.school.pulse.panel@census.gov). The Census Bureau is collecting the data for NCES.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

**Christopher Chapman**  
Associate Commissioner  
National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)  
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## November Tote Bags – Non-responding schools and can accept incentives

Date

Dear Principal,

Recently, we sent you an invitation to join the U.S. Department of Education’s School Pulse Panel. We have selected (Your school) as part of a small number of schools to participate in this important panel. The panel provides a monthly snapshot of school operating status and COVID-19 safety measures that is used to help determine Federal policy to support schools during this difficult time.

We will be sending the next survey to {email} on November 9th. Please respond to ensure that your school and students have a voice in public policy as we navigate the challenges posed by COVID-19.

To learn more about the School Pulse Panel, visit [www.census.gov/schoolpulse](http://www.census.gov/schoolpulse).

**If you do not receive the email on November 9th, please contact the School Pulse Panel staff at 1-844-868-3661.** Please complete this survey as soon as possible.

Participating schools will be compensated up to **\$5,000** for the year if each survey is completed. Total time to complete the survey is expected to be 2-3 hours each month. You are encouraged to work with district staff to complete the survey. Working with your district will greatly reduce the time it takes to complete the survey. On the back of this letter are specific instructions for accessing and completing the survey. Participation is voluntary.

### **What’s Next?**

After completing the November survey, you will receive a new survey monthly, through August 2022. Each survey will focus on various aspects of your school’s response to the pandemic.

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As an additional token of our appreciation, I have included a tote bag with this letter. Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

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Associate Commissioner  
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- use of technology, and
- information on staffing.

### **Completing the Survey**

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