

WRDSB STUDENT CENSUS: BACKGROUND AND REFERENCE GUIDE

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| BACKGROUND AND PROCESS | 1 |
| PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES..... | 1 |
| POLICIES, STANDARDS, AND LEGISLATION | 2 |
| PRIVACY AND DATA SECURITY | 3 |
| CONSULTATION, COMMUNICATION, AND DISTRIBUTION..... | 4 |
| DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS | 6 |
| LIMITATIONS | 8 |
| KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION | 9 |
| GUIDANCE FOR INTERPRETING CENSUS DATA..... | 10 |
| ONGOING KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION | 12 |

BACKGROUND AND PROCESS

The background and process section of this report summarizes the purpose and objectives of the WRDSB Student Census, the policies, standards, and legislation that were followed in its preparation, the privacy and data security protocols that were followed, and the data collection and analysis processes used.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The WRDSB Student Census (the Census) was a voluntary and confidential survey of all WRDSB students launched on April 19, 2021. The Census gathered information about the cultural and social identities of students from parents/guardians of students from kindergarten to grade 3 and directly from students in grades 4-12+. The goal of the Census is to better understand the diversity within the WRDSB. The Census will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural, social and demographic makeup of our students.

The objective of the Census is to support the board's commitments as described in its Equity and Inclusion Policy: "The Waterloo Region District School Board is committed to the principles of equity through inclusive programs, curriculum, services, and operations in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Education Act, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Board and its staff are committed to the elimination of all types of discrimination as outlined in Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy." The Ontario Human Rights Commission has stated that "data collection can play a useful and often essential role in creating strong human rights and human resources strategies for organizations in the public, private and non-profit sectors."¹ By collecting and reporting on identity-based data of our students, we are actualizing a key area of focus in the Equity and Inclusion Policy around accountability and transparency. A full copy of the WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Policy is available online.²

The Census was also designed and implemented in alignment with the WRDSB's operational priority: "Commitment to an organizational culture rooted in human rights and equity". Among the strategies under this priority is the Board's effort to "Determine next steps for addressing systemic biases and gaps." The realization of the Census responds directly to the strategy's intended outcome, which states that "Self-identification data for all students will be collected through a student census." You can access the WRDSB Operational Plan on the WRDSB website³.

Ontario school boards are mandated to collect identity-based student information by 2023 under Ontario's Anti-Racism Act (ARA). Under the ARA, Ontario Regulation 267/18⁴ requires all Ontario school boards to apply the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism (the Data Standards) to the collection of identity-based data with a commitment to disaggregate key demographic and student record data for the purposes of evidence-based decision-making on our human rights and equity commitments.

Census questions included those required under the Data Standards as well as several additional questions identified by the Ministry of Education to collect data based on the grounds protected against discrimination in the Ontario Human Rights Code. The Census specifically asks about Indigenous status,

¹ OHRC Count Me In! Guidelines (p. 3):

http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Count_me_in%21_Collecting_human_rights_based_data.pdf

² Equity and Inclusion Policy: <https://www.wrdsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/1008-Equity-and-Inclusion.pdf>

³ WRDSB Operational Plan: <https://www.wrdsb.ca/learning/2020-21-operational-plan/>

⁴ Ontario Regulation 267/18: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/r18267>

ethnic/cultural background, racial identity, first language, citizenship status, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, health/disability status, and socioeconomic circumstances.

POLICIES, STANDARDS, AND LEGISLATION

In the Province of Ontario there are several regulations and initiatives that require and/or promote the collection of identity-based data, specifically for the purpose of identifying systemic discrimination and supporting human rights-based initiatives throughout the province.

In 2017, the Ontario Ministry of Education released Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan. Identity-based data collection is among the key initiatives outlined in the plan. Under its key initiative of 'Data Collection, Integration and Reporting', the action plan highlights that, "A consistent approach to collecting and analyzing voluntarily provided identity-based data will help local school boards identify where systemic barriers exist and will help determine how to eliminate discriminatory biases in order to support equity and student achievement and well-being through training and targeted programs and supports."⁵

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) and the Anti-Racism Directorate (ARD) actively advocate for identity-based data collection in their roles to promote and advance human rights in Ontario and to eliminate systemic racism in government policies, decisions, and programs. In 2009, the OHRC released its 'Count me in!'⁶ resource to provide guidance to organizations for collecting human rights-based data. In it the OHRC describes how identity-based data collection, is both permitted by and can help to ensure adherence to Ontario's Human Rights Code⁷ (as well as other federal legislation such as the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Employment Equity Act, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms).

In 2017, the Province of Ontario enacted the Anti-Racism Act⁸ which states "Everyone deserves to be treated with fairness, respect and dignity, and the Government of Ontario is committed to eliminating systemic racism and advancing racial equity." Under the Act, the Province established the Anti-Racism Directorate and the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism (the Standards) in 2018.⁹ The Standards were designed to, "establish consistent, effective practices for producing reliable information to support evidence-based decision-making and public accountability to help eliminate systemic racism and promote racial equity." The stated purpose of the Standards is "to set out requirements for the collection, use, disclosure, de-identification, management, publication and reporting of information, including personal information." The requirements set out in the Standards also provide specific guidance on the sequence and wording of questions asking about Indigenous identity, ethnic origin, racial identity, and religion.

The provincial policies, standards, and legislation described above were key foundational documents that informed the WRDSB Student Census process.

⁵ Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan (2017), p. 18:

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/education_equity_plan_en.pdf

⁶ 'Count me in!' - Collecting Human Rights-Based Data:

http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Count_me_in%21_Collecting_human_rights_based_data.pdf

⁷ Ontario Human Rights Code, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90h19>

⁸ Ontario's Anti-Racism Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, c. 15: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/17a15>

⁹ Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism:

<https://www.ontario.ca/document/data-standards-identification-and-monitoring-systemic-racism>

PRIVACY AND DATA SECURITY

The WRDSB Student Census took privacy and confidentiality very seriously. Prior to launching the Census WRDSB Research and Privacy and Freedom of Information staff conducted a privacy impact assessment.

The Student Census was confidential, but it was not anonymous. Teachers, principals, other school board staff, and the Ministry of Education will not see individual student answers. WRDSB Research and Evidence-based Practice Department (Research Department) staff and Information Technology Services (ITS) staff can access individual answers, but only as needed to do research. In all reports about the Student Census, individual responses will be combined with the answers of other Census participants so that no one will be able to identify any individual student information. A small number of Research Department and ITS staff will be able to match Census responses to student email addresses and identification numbers but only when required for the purposes of conducting research. In all reports, student information will be combined with the information of other students in a way that will not allow individual students to be identified. The WRDSB Student Census process follows all provincial freedom of information and privacy laws (i.e., Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act of Ontario, “MFIPPA”).

The WRDSB and the staff of the Research Department are committed to protecting the confidentiality of all student data. We have aligned our process to ensure that we meet the regulations and best practices laid out in the MFIPPA¹⁰. Additionally, our work follows the guidelines for collecting data for identities protected under the Ontario Human Rights Code¹¹; the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism¹²; and the Education Act¹³. These legislations and guidelines have informed our privacy protocols for the Student Census.

The WRDSB Student Census process adheres to all freedom of information and privacy laws (i.e., MFIPPA). The only WRDSB staff members with access to individual student information will be members of the Research Department. ITS staff may be granted access to individual student information, as needed, to provide technical support for data management purposes. Identifiable student information will not be accessible to any other persons unless required by law. Personal identifying information will only be used for the purposes of linking Student Census data to existing student data. Research Department staff will create a de-identified data file by linking Census data to existing student data using unique student ID numbers. Once the information from the Census and the existing student data has been linked, Research Department staff will remove all personally identifying information from the data file prior to conducting analyses and preparing reports.

The individual responses provided in the Student Census will remain on encrypted password-protected servers and on password-protected laptops accessible only by staff of WRDSB’s Research and Evidence-Based Practice Department. The research staff is committed to ensuring that raw data (individual responses) are never viewed by any unauthorized persons.

Census results will be reported in a summarized format (including de-identified data files which are required under the Anti-Racism Act), meaning that all responses will be combined with the information of other students to ensure that the confidentiality of individual student responses remains protected. As an

¹⁰ Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act of Ontario:

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90m56>

¹¹ Protected grounds: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/guidelines-collecting-data-enumerated-grounds-under-code>

¹² Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism:

<https://www.ontario.ca/document/data-standards-identification-and-monitoring-systemic-racism/standards-and-guidance#section-1>

¹³ Education Act of Ontario: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90e02>

additional layer of privacy protection, the analysis and reporting process will use a data suppression protocol, meaning that any research results that represent fewer than 15 individual students will not be shared. Data suppression is used to ensure that the data is grouped in a way that will not allow the readers of any prepared reports or documents to identify the specific responses provided by any of the students who participated in the Census.

The Census data was collected using the online survey platform Qualtrics. To ensure that data will remain secure using this platform, WRDSB research staff with support from the WRDSB privacy officer conducted a Service Provider Privacy Security Assessment in 2019. Using WRDSB's security assessment tool, research staff reviewed Qualtrics' publicly available data security documents and submitted our draft of the assessment with follow up questions to Qualtrics staff to gather further details and validate our assessment of their data security protocols. The assessment confirmed that Qualtrics' privacy protocols adhere to Canadian and international standards for data security. It also confirmed that Qualtrics will not access data collected by the WRDSB without the permission of an authorized member of the WRDSB research department. Qualtrics staff does not access or share any of the survey data that is collected by the WRDSB as part of their business practice.

WRDSB's Research and Evidence-Based Practice Department has developed a data retention plan to ensure that data is managed and deleted in an appropriate fashion. Data will be securely disposed of as per the WRDSB Records and Retention Schedule. Keeping data for a specific number of years allows important information to be available to help measure changes in our system over time.

Access to the full WRDSB Student Census Privacy Impact Assessment is available on the WRDSB Student Census page¹⁴.

CONSULTATION, COMMUNICATION, AND DISTRIBUTION

Before launching the Census, WRDSB staff conducted consultations with students, diverse community members, Ontario's Education Equity Secretariat, and other Ontario school boards to ensure that our process was based on the best advice and best strategies available. Stakeholders engaged in the consultation prior to launching the Census included:

- Equity and Inclusion Advisory Group
- Black Brilliance Advisory Committee members
- Indigenous representatives from across Waterloo Region
- 2SLGBTQIA+ (i.e., OK2BME, Spectrum)
- Student Senate
- Special Education Advisory Committee
- WRDSB English Language Learning Consultants
- YMCA Immigrant Services
- Privacy and freedom information experts
- Ministry of Education Equity Secretariat
- Staff Advisory Committee
- Parent Involvement Committee
- System leaders (e.g., superintendents, principals, managers)

Consultation meetings were initiated in person in the fall of 2019 but were shifted to an entirely remote format by the spring of 2020. The consultation meetings engaged a variety of strategies with stakeholders

¹⁴ WRDSB Student Census: Commitment to Student Privacy - <https://www.wrdsb.ca/about-the-wrdsb/research/student-Census/commitment-to-student-privacy/>

including face-to-face and online presentations and consultations; awareness and information sessions; review and revision of the privacy, data security, and data collection approaches; review and input upon Census questions; and the development of communications materials. Key learnings from consultation informed important adjustments to how Student Census questions were asked; how messages about the Census were communicated; our privacy and data security processes; and what resources were needed to support students, parents/caregivers, and staff.

Following the consultation phase, a system wide communication plan was launched, followed by the data collection period. Table 1 below describes the communication and data collection timeline for the Census activities.

Table 1: Student Census Communication and Data Collection Timeline

| Census Activity | Date |
|---|------------------------------|
| Launch of internal staff information site | March 25, 2021 |
| Launch of public Student Census site and communication campaign | March 31, 2021 |
| Opt-out deadline/closure of opt out link | April 9, 2021/April 23, 2021 |
| Paper copy mailouts | April 11-12, 2021 |
| Email invitations/Census links sent to students and parents/guardians | April 19, 2021 |
| System-wide reminder emails to students (grades 4-12+) | April 26, 2021 |
| System-wide reminder emails to parents/guardians (grades K-3) | April 28, 2021 |
| Closure of Student Census data collection | June 30, 2021 |

Because participation in the Census was voluntary, efforts were made to ensure that students and parents/guardians understood that every question on the Student Census was optional. Students and parents/guardians were free to choose which (if any) questions they wish to answer. All students and parents/guardians could choose not to participate, to stop participating, or to skip a question at any time. Additionally, parents/guardians of students under 18 years of age could ask that their child be exempt from participating in the Census. As part of our communication campaign, information on the ‘opt out’ process was distributed electronically by email, on our website, and on social media. Parents/guardians could request an exemption for their child by completing an online form, or by contacting their child’s teacher or school administrator school by phone or by email. WRDSB’s Research Department communicated with schools to ensure that the parents’/guardians’ desire for students not to complete the Census was respected and enacted. When a student was opted out, their email address was removed from the Student Census email invitation list.

The Student Census opt-out deadline was set for April 9, 2021 (but remained open to parents/guardians until April 23, 2021). If a parent/guardian did not submit a request to opt-out, all students were still free to choose not to participate in the Student Census after receiving an email invite.

The implementation strategy was designed as a hybrid approach (planned for both in-person and online Census facilitation), scheduled to be launched immediately after the week-long school break in April 2021. However, the process was transitioned to a fully remote process due to the Ministry decision to transition all Ontario schools to remote learning for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year due to the increased spread of COVID-19 throughout the province at the time.

Reaching and supporting families and students

Personalized invitations and survey links, sent through our Qualtrics survey platform, were the primary method of reaching most students and parents/guardians. To support the diverse needs of students and families, several strategies were mobilized to provide students and parents/guardians with additional

supports to encourage and facilitate their participation. Strategies mobilized, supported, and encouraged throughout the Census data collection included:

- reading aloud of Census questions by staff to students
- individualized support for students with IEPs or other specialized needs
- translation of Student Census questionnaire and support information
- formatting online materials (including all support resources and the Census questionnaire) so that they are compatible with web-based screen readers and translation applications
- printing and mailing paper copies of the Student Census questionnaire to students and families engaged in paper-based remote learning (Cohort D) and/or not reachable by email

A facilitation guide was developed and made available via email and through the staff intranet, with information and guidelines for staff. Staff were encouraged to review the guide prior to implementing the Census with their students. In addition to the staff guide, publicly available glossary and support information was also prepared and shared on the public Student Census website.¹⁵

Translated versions of the Student Census online information letter, opt out form, and questionnaire were available in 34 languages through the online survey platform Qualtrics (ten of the most common languages used by WRDSB students were translated professionally, the other languages were translated using the digital auto-translation function in the Qualtrics platform). Additionally, all materials posted on both the board website and the Qualtrics platform were verified for compatibility with electronic translation applications (i.e., Google Translate) to allow students, staff, parents/caregivers, and community members to review resources in an even wider range of languages. The Student Census informational video was prepared with closed captioning availability in multiple languages for the communication campaign and remained available on the Student Census webpage for students, parents/caregivers, and staff throughout the Census implementation.

For students with special needs, staff were encouraged to consider and apply the same or similar strategies and accommodations that would normally be used to support students in their regular learning and assessment. Parents/guardians and students were encouraged to reach out to the staff at their child's school for support in completing the Census. Key staff members at schools may have included: the school principal, school vice-principal, guidance counsellor, classroom teacher, special education resource teacher, educational assistant, school settlement worker, English second language teacher, or child & youth worker.

Online support resources and tools were also shared through the Census website to help make the sharing of Census information and participation in the Census more accessible. Online material was formatted to allow for screen reader and digital translation compatibility. Instructional information and resources for how to use digital translation and screen reading applications were included among our online resources (e.g., Read&Write for Google & Google Translate).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The Census was officially launched via system-wide email invitations on April 19, 2021. Email invitations were sent to approximately 20,400 parents/guardians of students in grades K-3 and 43,100 WRDSB students from grades 4 to 12+. On April 11, 2021, approximately 2,100 paper surveys were mailed directly to students and parents/guardians who were enrolled in paper-based remote learnings and/or for

¹⁵ WRDSB Student Census Glossary and Support information: <https://www.wrdsb.ca/about-the-wrdsb/research/student-Census/glossary-and-support-information/>

whom an updated contact email could not be found. The online Census questionnaire remained open for approximately two months. System-wide reminder emails were sent in the week following the initial launch. Following the first three weeks of data collection, the Research Department coordinated with WRDSB senior leadership and school administrators in targeted ways to encourage ongoing uptake of the Census based upon the response rates on a school-by-school basis.

Paper-based Census responses were returned to the WRDSB Research Department through addressed envelopes with pre-paid postage that accompanied the Census mailout. The returned paper-based Census responses were entered into the Qualtrics survey platform by Research Department staff.

Throughout the Census collection Research Department staff actively responded to individual and school-based queries received from parents/caregivers, students, and staff through the department contact email. Most of the responses consisted of ensuring students and parents/guardians were able to access their email invitations, while some responses clarified key issues related to Student Census background information, purpose, and processes.

Responses were monitored as they were entered into the Qualtrics platform by students and parents/guardians. Monitoring the Census consisted of reviewing responses for consistency and accuracy and identifying any problems or concerns that could be observed in the data. A small number of entries were identified as responses of concern during the data collection period. Follow-up with students, staff, and families regarding student Census responses were managed on a case-by-case basis. Our review and analysis of the data did not seek to challenge or refute how a participant chose to self-identify. If a response was confirmed to be inaccurate or incorrect and had been entered accidentally or by mistake, the response could be corrected or removed to improve accuracy of the Census data.

The parent/guardian version of the Census was officially closed for collection on June 15, 2021, with a total 8418 parent/guardian responses. The student version of the Census was officially closed for collection on June 30, 2021, with a total of 23,238 student responses. A total of 237 parent/guardian and 60 student paper versions of the Student Census were entered into Qualtrics by Research Department staff. The data was downloaded from the Qualtrics platform into Microsoft Excel for data validation and data cleaning. The electronic and paper responses from each the student and parent/guardian versions of the Census to produce two separate raw data files. These files used a variety of quality assurance checks to identify and remove incomplete, duplicate, or inconsistent/incoherent Student Census entries. A small number of entries were removed as the responses clearly demonstrated inaccuracies or inconsistencies that made the data unusable. Most of the removed Census entries were either duplicate or blank Census entries. Following review and validation, final data files with 8368 parent/guardian responses and 22871 student responses were prepared for data analysis.

Data linking of Census data with existing student record data will be undertaken following the review and release of initial Student Census data. Data linking will be conducted in accordance protocols developed as part of the privacy impact assessment. Individual identifying data (i.e., name, email address, and Student ID#) are removed from all working data files. Each student entry was replaced with a unique anonymous ID number. A data linking key (only accessible to Research Department staff) was developed will permit the ability to link individual responses directly with existing student record data (such as achievement data; credit accumulation; program enrolment; suspension and expulsion data; and graduation rates). Data linking will be carried out using WRDSB's license for Microsoft's Power BI data analytics and visualization software (access to this analytics software is restricted to Research and Evidence-based Practice staff members). Sharing of results generated through Power Bi will follow the same privacy and reporting protocols applied to all aspects of the Census. This linking initiative will be part of ongoing knowledge mobilization of Student Census results and efforts to identify and respond to evidence of disproportionality and/or discriminatory practices based on student identity.

LIMITATIONS

COVID-19 Pandemic - The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the planning and implementation of the Student Census. The Census was initially planned to be launched in 2020. Planning and consultation in late 2019 and early 2020 were also delayed due to labour negotiations between the Ministry and employee groups. When the COVID-19 pandemic began in the spring of 2020 all Student Census activities were postponed. Pandemic related restrictions and priorities introduced scheduling and communication barriers to consultation which slowed efforts to engage with students, staff, and community during the planning processes. As noted, the Census was formally launched on April 19, 2021, this unexpectedly coincided with the Ministry of Education decision to transition all Ontario schools to a remote learning model. As such, all Student Census collection was facilitated remotely. The lack of in-person facilitation and engagement created a distance between students and inconsistencies across the system as schools and classrooms adjusted their instructional and engagement strategies from the classroom to the online environment. The Census faced similar demands and challenges as the rest of the system negotiated the emergent challenges of supporting students and accommodating the fast-changing pandemic related issues including safety, well-being, and engagement.

Email distribution technical troubleshooting - The Student Census was the first time the WRDSB used Qualtrics to send unique email links via email to students and parents/guardians throughout our entire system. This approach provided us with many advantages, but unfortunately introduced some technical issues. In our initial system-wide email launch, it was quickly identified that a significant number of email invitations for both students and parents/guardians were being filtered by email spam filters. In collaboration with IT, this issue was resolved for students' WRDSB email addresses. We were not able to quickly determine a technical solution for external email addresses (i.e., parent/guardian emails). As such, regular communication through public communication channels and targeted re-issuing of invitations to parents were needed to ensure parents/guardians could find and complete the Census invitation for their children. The spam filter impacted the effective communication and distribution of the initial survey launch and may have negatively impacted the overall response rate. An additional technical challenge identified following the Census launch was the activation of a distribution filter in the Qualtrics platform that was applied to many parent/guardian responses. The filter resulted in the anonymization of many parent/guardian responses. This distribution filter resulted in the removal of unique identifier information which means that researchers are restricted from being able to link many Census results to individual student record data for students in grades K-3. This issue was resolved later in the data collection process and does not affect any data collected from students in grades 4-12.

Participation rates/representativeness – The COVID-19 pandemic and technical troubleshooting with the system-wide email distribution were contributors to the participation rates of students and parents/guardians in the Census. With over 30,000 responses, the Census is a large and robust data set which provides us with a range of analytical and learning opportunities. Though efforts were made to give all students (grades 4-12+) and parents/guardians (with students in K to grade 3) the opportunity to participate, it is essential to acknowledge that the Census results do not represent all students in the WRDSB. The Census was voluntary and open to all students, therefore there were no random, statistically representative sampling techniques used. Because the Census participation was not random, it is not possible to apply a statistical confidence level/interval of the Census results to the full student population of the WRDSB. It is highly likely that there are differences between participating and nonparticipating students that cannot be understood through an analysis of Student Census data. On the other hand, it is also likely that lessons learned and actions that emerge from the Census will be relevant for students regardless of their participation in the Census. Understanding and responding to the identity-

based experiences and outcomes of more than 30,000 students is an important and powerful opportunity for the WRDSB.

Social and economic measures impacted by the pandemic – While the reliability of data related to most student identities would not be directly affected by the pandemic, it is important to acknowledge that the social and economic conditions of many families and households were significantly impacted by COVID-19. As such, it is possible that for many students and families, the socioeconomic conditions as reported during the Census may be quite different from those they had experienced before the pandemic. This may indeed change again as the restrictions and economic conditions change in the months and years after the Census data was collected. Though it will be difficult to compare directly with pre-pandemic figures, it is also worth noting that the number of students and parents/guardians reporting mental health challenges in the Census was also likely impacted by the pandemic.

KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

The knowledge mobilization section of this report discusses the principles, guidance, and plans related to the ongoing knowledge mobilization efforts related to WRDSB Student Census data.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR USING STUDENT DATA

As we continue our efforts to understand and use the data from the WRDSB Student Census, the Research and Evidence-based Practice Department, through discussions with WRDSB staff and community representatives developed a series of guiding principles as a means to strengthen our communication and mobilization of Student Census results.

- Ensure student wellbeing and safety
- Respect and protect the privacy of all students
- Deepen and broaden our understanding of identity-based student experiences and outcomes
- Translate learning into action

These principles will be used to guide all decisions about how WRDSB Student Census data will be used. The first and most important principle is student wellbeing and safety. The Census data includes potentially sensitive information that can provoke complicated and potentially harmful conversations and narratives. Being careful and thoughtful about how we engage in discussions about student identity is essential to ensuring that the best interests of our students (especially those most likely to be impacted) remains the foundation upon which decisions are made and actions are taken. This includes our legal and ethical commitment to respecting and protecting the privacy of the information shared by students and parents/guardians. Our data security and privacy protocols align with our legal obligations under the Anti-Racism Act, the Education Act, and the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Additionally, all data management and reporting practices have been fully elaborated in the WRDSB Student Census Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA).¹⁶ All reporting and data mobilization will be conducted in adherence to the protocols laid out in the PIA (available publicly on the WRDSB Student Census website).¹⁷

As part of our analysis and learning efforts, we are committed to using the Census data to deepen and broaden our understanding the experiences and the outcomes of students based on their diverse identities. The Census data will help us to identify where differences and disproportionalities exist among students. Improving our understanding these differences requires an ongoing effort to review the Census

¹⁶ WRDSB Student Census Privacy Impact Assessment: <https://www.wrdsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/WRDSB-Student-Census-Privacy-Impact-Assessment-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁷ WRDSB Student Census website: <https://www.wrdsb.ca/about-the-wrdsb/research/student-Census/>

data related to other contextual factors and WRDSB initiatives. This will involve continued consultation and capacity building with staff, students, and community to ensure that we have developed the best understanding possible as we plan to share and act upon what we have learned.

Finally, the ultimate goal of the Census initiative is to identify how to improve and change WRDSB programs, policies, and practices to meet the diverse needs of WRDSB students. Using Student Census data to make informed and targeted decisions that strengthen our work to meet the needs of students who have been underserved and underrecognized in our system is the most important accomplishment that can be achieved through the WRDSB Student Census initiative.

GUIDANCE FOR INTERPRETING CENSUS DATA

Student Census results can tell us where gaps and differences exist within our system, based upon how students self-identity (grades 4-12+) or upon the identities indicated by their parent/guardian (grades K-3). Now that the WRDSB has heard from students and parents/guardians, the Census learnings can serve as a mirror for the Board to reflect on how to move forward. The WRDSB is responsible for supporting all students, and when gaps, disproportionate experiences and outcomes related to diverse student identities are identified, it is the Board's responsibility to reflect upon how to do better.

WHAT DOES THE STUDENT CENSUS DATA TELL US?

- The Census collected Identity-based data that was previously unavailable in the WRDSB
- Census results tells us how students and parents/guardians responded to the Census questions (*responses may differ from how others might see or describe the student*)
- We can cross-reference within/across identities & other existing student data
- We can identify if/how/where student experiences and outcomes differ in relation to self-described identities

Student Census data represents how students and parents/guardians responded to the questions at the time that they were asked. The data in the Census is self-identified. It represents how students see themselves and how parents/guardians see their children according to the questions as presented. This could mean that for some students the responses to the Census may differ from the identities/responses that others might expect or assume for that student.

As alluded to above, we need to be care about assumptions that might be made about the responses and experiences of students and parents/guardians who did not participate in the Census. While the large sample size (over 30,000) empowers us to respond the diverse needs and experiences of thousands of students, it is important to remember that it is likely that there are differences between participating students and nonparticipating students. It is reasonable and responsible to consider that lessons learned and initiatives mobilized as a result of the Census will be of benefit to both participating and non-participating students alike.¹⁸

¹⁸ While this is a large sample size, because the student Census did not use random sampling techniques, we are not able to assign a confidence level/interval to the Census results. For context, to obtain a 95%, +/-%5 confidence level/interval using a fully random selection technique for a population the size of the WRDSB student population, 382 respondents are needed. For disaggregated results (e.g., representative statistics related to a particular identity group) similar/targeted sample size calculations are required.

When gaps and differences are identified among and across diverse students, it is important that we understand the Census results can tell us that the gaps and differences exist, but they do not describe the cause of the identified gaps and differences. Though many students who share an identity may also share common experiences and outcomes, the Census results on their own cannot show that student identities are the cause or the reason for differences in student experiences and outcomes. It is also essential to understand that while differences in student experiences/outcomes may be observed between groups of students with differing identities, this does not mean that these disproportionate experiences and outcomes are shared amongst all (or even the majority) of students with a shared identity. There is a wide range of experiences and outcomes within and across all identities. It is not accurate or appropriate to assume anything about an individual student or a small group of students based on the aggregated, average, collective results generated from the Student Census. Findings that relate to a smaller population of students (i.e., identities that have a small number of students that identify with them or schools with a small number of students who participated in the Census) should be considered less representative of broader student experiences and outcomes when compared with data that represents a larger number of students. As such, it is essential that we be careful not to make assumptions or draw broad conclusions based on results that have emerged from a limited number of students.

WHAT DOESN'T THE STUDENT CENSUS DATA TELL US?

- Census results should not be used to make judgements or assumptions about the experiences or outcomes of individual or small groups of students (*this is to protect privacy AND a recognition that within identity groups there is a significant amount of diversity*)
- Census results do not allow us to determine the cause of outcomes and differences among and between students with diverse identities (*our Census data on its own does not tell us why these differences exist*)
- We cannot reliably predict responses from students who did not participate (*information for just over 30,000 students is included in the Census data*)

Checking our biases and assumptions is essential to using the data both accurately and in a way that will limit any potential harm that might be caused by decisions and actions that result from using Census data. Interpreting results in a manner that reinforces existing prejudices can serve to perpetuate the inequities and discrimination that the WRDSB seeks to eliminate. WRDSB's Census analysis approach and knowledge mobilization work is built on a recognition that "Numbers are no more obvious, neutral, and factual than any other form of data. Statistics are socially constructed in exactly the same way that interview data and survey returns are constructed."¹⁹ We all hold assumptions and pre-conceived ideas about why gaps and discrimination persist in our system. Student Census results should not simply be used to reinforce ideas and beliefs that we already hold, but as part of broader discussion and inquiry aimed at understanding and communicating about the existence of gaps and discriminatory practices and policies. Student Census results will be contextualized and cross-referenced with a variety of student data and systemic and local information to help us to understand and improve structures and practices that support all students.²⁰

The data allows us to more accurately identify where our system disproportionately supports some students and while leaving others behind. The WRDSB will be able to look more closely at which students

¹⁹ Qtd from p. 163 of Gillborn, D., Warmington, P. & Demack, S. (2018). QuantCrit: education, policy, 'Big Data' and principles for a critical race theory of statistics. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 21(2), 158–179

²⁰ Multiple measures – Victoria L. Bernhardt:

https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/curriculum/pdf/multiple_measures.pdf

and communities need more supports and which programs and interventions are failing to serve the diverse needs of our students. The Census is part of a long-term effort by the board that will allow us to look at disproportionality over time. Using the first ever Student Census data as our reference point (baseline), we will be able to look at change over time and identify the extent to which our system-wide initiatives can be shown to have achieved our Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights goals.

It is important to think carefully about how and why we are using Student Census data. As data begins to be mobilized WRDSB and the public, some guiding questions that will help guide knowledge sharing include:

- How do individual assumptions or expectations inform how the data is interpreted?
- How can Census data be used ethically to support work throughout the WRDSB?
- Which identity data is needed to help promote learning and support action?
- How will we ensure that the data is used in a respectful and informed way?
- Who could be affected by using the data? What effect(s) might it have (esp. on the students whose identities are being explored and discussed)?
- Who is involved in the analysis and interpretation of the data?
- How will using the data help to support students, staff, or families?
- What activities, strategies, programs, or policies will be assessed/influenced by using the data?

ONGOING KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

Throughout the summer and fall of 2021, WRDSB Research Staff prepared reference documents, demographic counts, data files, and data tables from the Census results. In fall of 2021 and winter of 2022, Research Department staff began preliminary data validation meetings with staff and community representatives as follow up to pre-launch consultations and in accordance with the Data Standards directive of “Considering community interests before releasing potentially sensitive information”²¹.

Preliminary, confidential consultations were conducted with staff and community members to better inform how Student Census data would be analyzed and shared in public reports. A total of eight preliminary data consultations were held, as follows:

- General findings and discussion – staff of the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights department
- Disabilities and health conditions – with members of the Special Education Advisory Council
- Racial identity, citizenship status, and religion/spirituality – with selected members of the Equity and Inclusion Advisory Group
- Gender identity and sexual orientation – with members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community of Waterloo Region
- First Nations, Metis (Michif), and Inuit Identity – with members of the Indigenous Education and Advisory Council
- General findings and discussions – Communications department
- General findings and discussion – Senior Strategy Team (e.g., directors, superintendents, senior managers)
- General findings and discussion – WRDSB trustee seminar

Feedback and guidance from Census consultations with staff and community guided the preparation of publicly released Student Census reports and data. Knowledge mobilization is an ongoing commitment. The initial release of Student Census summary results should be considered and understood to be the first phase of knowledge mobilization and part of a long term, integrated effort to understand and support equity, inclusion, and Indigenous sovereignty in the WRDSB.

²¹ Public release and reporting: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/data-standards-identification-and-monitoring-systemic-racism/public-release-and-reporting>