



EASTCHESTER UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Dr. Marilyn C. Terranova, Superintendent of Schools

June 2009

Dear Parent and Guardians:

I am writing to inform you about new guidelines from the U.S. Department of Education regarding the collection of data on race and ethnicity for public school students and staff. The federal government, which requires all states to collect this information, has developed a new way to report ethnicity and race that includes new categories.

The federal government has developed these new categories in order to provide a more accurate picture of the nation's ethnic and racial diversity. This will enable individuals to be identified in ethnic and racial classifications and in more than one racial category. Previously, forms allowed individuals to be identified in only one racial category.

In the past, the Eastchester Schools have asked families to provide information on students' race and ethnicity at the time of enrollment. Beginning in the fall of 2009, we will ask the families of newly enrolled students AND of all current students to complete a brief form to update information on their children's ethnicity and race.

The data with the new ethnicity and race categories will be used in the same manner that such information is currently used. For example, the federal government uses racial and ethnic data in reporting and analyzing test results, such as the New York State Assessments in grades 3-8. The new categories will replace all existing categories for use in state and federal data collections that include data on ethnicity or race.

A question-and-answer sheet providing additional information about these changes is available on our website at www.Eastchester.k12.ny.us

Sincerely,

Dr. Marilyn C. Terranova, Superintendent

MCT:JM
Enclosure

New Federal Guidelines for Collecting and Reporting Race and Ethnicity Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why do you need this information?

A: The demographics of our society have changed significantly in the last few decades. These changes will allow our students and staff to more accurately describe who they are. We are required by the Federal government to use the new categories. All states and school districts are required to do the same. There are good reasons in addition to meeting federal requirements, though. We routinely report aggregate information to the federal government for funding and evaluation purposes, as well as civil right compliance. We also use racial and ethnic data to evaluate our placement and program needs, providing the best services for all students. The U.S. Census in 2000 used the new categories. This is a trend that education and human service agencies will follow.

Q: Is the federal government checking my immigration status?

A: No. This information will be maintained in your student's record. It will not be reported to any federal agency in a way that identifies you or your child. No one will check for immigration status from the information you give here.

Q: Will the school release my student's race and ethnicity to other parties?

A: Individual student records are protected the Federal Education Records and Privacy Act (FERPA). The new race and ethnicity standards have no effect on FERPA's protection of student records. FERPA does not designate race and ethnicity as directory information, and race and ethnicity have the same protection as any other non-directory information in a student's education record.

Q: I am Hispanic. Why do I have to answer more questions?

A: One of the major changes is the recognition that members of Hispanic populations can be of different races. The federal government would like to afford Hispanic/Latino populations the opportunity to better describe themselves according to their culture and heritage. So yes, you will be asked to select one or more races, even if you have indicated that you are Hispanic/Latino.

Q: How do I know I won't be discriminated against after I've told you I belong to a minority group?

A: This is exactly why we need to maintain better racial and ethnic data about our students and staff. We are required to maintain this information about each individual in his or her record, in case a civil right investigation surfaces. Again, state and local guidelines are in place to ensure that racial and ethnic data will not be reported elsewhere in a way that you may be identified. The state and districts follow FERPA rules and regulations to safeguard the privacy of student records (see question above).

Q: You can't make me do it, can you?

A: No, we can't; but providing the information would be beneficial for you or your child. We are required to provide an answer on your behalf, if you choose not to provide such information. The federal government believes that in getting aggregate numbers from states and district, it would be more preferable to have complete data this way, than having missing data.