

# Frequently Asked Questions Concerning the New Federal Race and Ethnicity Categories

**1. 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, Plainview Public Schools, 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 rights 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.

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

A: Individual student records are protected by 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 nondirectory information in a student's education record.

**3. Q: Who will provide the information?**

A: Parents will complete a brief form to identify their children's ethnic and racial identity. Staff members will receive a form to fill out their own information.

**4. Q: If I have already provided this information to the school system, why must I provide it again?**

A: In the past, forms for reporting race and ethnicity to the federal government allowed individuals to be identified in only one racial category. The new form enables individuals to be identified in ethnic and racial classifications and in more than one racial category. The federal government is requiring that ethnic and racial information for all students and staff be reported in this new way in order to reflect the nation's diversity more accurately.

**5. Q: When and how will the new information be gathered?**

A: Plainview Public Schools will follow the new federal guidelines beginning with fall enrollment in late July and early August, 2010. The new form will be distributed to all schools. The families of *newly enrolled students AND of all current students* will be asked to complete the form and return it to the school. The collection of data from staff will occur during August in-service.

**6. Q: What changes have been made?**

A: There are four major changes in the way that ethnicity and race data will be collected—

- There is now a two-part question on ethnicity and race. This allows individuals to report their heritage more accurately.
- The term "Hispanic" has been changed to "Hispanic or Latino"
- The racial category "Asian or Pacific Islander" has been separated into two new categories—"Asian" and "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander"
- Individuals will be able to select one or more races from the five racial groups

**7. Q: What are the ethnicity and race categories?**

A: The first part of the two-part question asks whether or not the respondent is Hispanic/Latino. The second part asks the respondent to select one or more races from the following five racial groups:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White

# Frequently Asked Questions Concerning the New Federal Race and Ethnicity Categories

## 8. Q: How are the new ethnicity and race categories defined?

### A: Ethnicity

- Hispanic or Latino. A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.

### Race

- American Indian or Alaska Native. A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains a tribal affiliation or community attachment.
- Asian. A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- Black or African American. A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.
- White. A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

## 9. Q: How will the information be used?

A: The data with the new ethnicity/race categories will be used in the same manner that racial/ethnic data are currently used. The new categories will replace the existing categories for use in all state and federally sponsored statistical data collections that include data on ethnicity or race. Some examples include student record cards and test results.

## 10. Q: Is the federal government checking my immigration status?

A: No. This information will be maintained in your employment or student records. 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.

## 11. 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.

## 12. 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). For employment records, none of the equal employment opportunity rules has changed. Your race and ethnicity will not be used to determine your employment status or condition.

## 13. 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 districts, it would be more preferable to have complete data this way, than having missing data.