

# Issues to Watch:

# 2020

FEBRUARY

MARCH

JUNE

JULY

MAY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER



# Issues to Watch 2020

It is difficult to believe a new decade is upon us. There's a lot to look forward to and many unknowns on the horizon in 2020, including a presidential election. This year ACS is highlighting three issues with implications for the work ACS—and you—do every day. Keeping tabs on these topics can help your organization recognize and harness opportunities and avoid potential pitfalls. If you'd like to learn more about any of these and other issues, or how your organization might best position itself to address them, please let us know.



- 1. 2020 U.S. Census**

- 2. Early Care and Education**

- 3. K-12 Education**

# 2020 U.S. Census

ACS has covered the 2020 U.S. Census in two previous *Issues to Watch* editions. Why? Because it's that important—it affects the work of in a variety of areas including early learning, K-12 education, workforce, Medicaid, and human services, as well as our own lives. Completing the census is also part of being an engaged citizen. And it's almost time! Census data collection begins in March 2020 and runs through July 2020.

## Implications of the Census

ACS wrote in July 2019 about the census [implications](#) for voting and political representation (it affects district maps and even the number of representatives to Congress). Census data also [influences](#) how governments and businesses plan for the future and for emergencies.

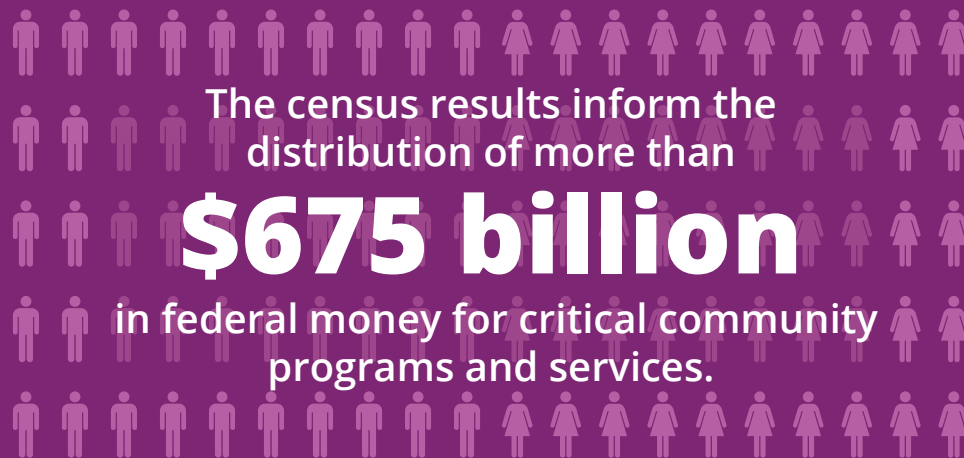
The census results inform the distribution of [more than \\$675 billion](#) in federal money for critical community programs and services such as schools, hospitals, roads, public works, and other programs. For example, there are billions of dollars of investment in children and in education, [including](#) Head Start, foster care, high-quality childcare, special education grants, Individuals with Disabilities Act grants, the

### UPDATE: The Citizenship Question and the Census

In July 2019, the Trump administration fought hard to add a question about citizenship status to the 2020 Census form. After a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in June that was unfavorable to the administration, the administration moved forward without the question. To read more about this, view [Issues to Watch 2019 Summer Update](#).

National School Lunch Program, and \$15.8 billion in Title I aid to school districts.

Results from the census also drive decisions about how to fund critical health and wellness programs such as the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Medicaid, Medicare, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, commonly known as food stamps), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and community health centers. Because census data also **forms** the basis for various surveys and assessments, it can affect the distribution of resources in more granular ways. For example, "medically underserved populations," a common measure for assessing health care needs, are defined using census data.



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Other important **safety net programs** like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Housing Choice Voucher Program also are funded based on census results.

Because of these implications, it is critical to have maximum participation in the census. When people are not counted, there may be insufficient resources to provide them the services they need and deserve.

# Undercounting

Unfortunately the census has and will continue to **undercount certain populations**—often those most in need of the very resources they don't get when they are not counted. There are complex reasons for undercounting, including methodological challenges with the census itself and reluctance among individuals to share information with the government. People of color are historically undercounted, as are those experiencing homelessness, those in low-income households, and renters. In addition, children under age 5 have been historically undercounted: In the 2010 Census, more than **2.2 million** in this age group were not included in the census result.

Many local, state, and national organizations are working tirelessly to reach these “hard to count” populations and maximize their representation; learn more by visiting the links under the Get Involved section.

## Get Involved

Each and every one of ACS' clients and partners is affected by census results, directly or indirectly, so it is important not only that you complete the census yourself, but also that you encourage family members, friends, colleagues, and clients to do so. Click **here** for a fact sheet you can use to (it is available in many languages). Consider volunteering to help get the word out about the census or consider applying for a temporary job with the Census Bureau to help collect data. Here are some resources to help you get started:

- **Pledge to complete the Census and spread the word**
- **Become involved with your local Complete Count Committee**
- **Learn more through the Get Out the Count campaign**
- **Get a job with the Census Bureau**

# Early Care and Education

ACS is entering 2020 enthusiastic about its ongoing role as a thought partner to grantees of the federal [Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five](#) (PDG B-5) program. ACS helps grantees with coalition building, community engagement, and communication, all with the ultimate [goal](#) of improving states' early childhood systems by building upon existing related federal, state, and local resources.

Last year, ACS supported four states who received the PDG B-5 grants (Indiana, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Oregon) and one national technical assistance PDG B-5 provider grantee. For the national technical assistance provider ACS developed and deployed two national webinars on best practices to reach home providers and other tough-to-reach audiences. In Louisiana ACS also supported local communities in creating a local vision for early childhood, developing coalitions and communication strategies to improve opportunities and inspire change for children birth to age five. ACS also helped the State of Louisiana update its Birth to Three Report. Through this work, ACS identified the following key takeaways with implications for the future of early learning nationally.

## Takeaway 1:

Authentic engagement of historically "hard-to-reach" populations is at the core of improving early

## About PDG B-5

PDG B-5 is a \$250 million competitive federal grant program established in 2015. [In late 2018](#), 46 states received grants to conduct state-level needs assessments and develop strategic plans. [In late 2019](#), the federal government announced recipients of the second funding round, including three-year renewal grants for 20 of the original 46 states to implement their strategic plans, and planning grants for six new states. [Learn more here.](#)

learning. The PDG B-5 planning phase allowed states to think deeply about how they are reaching populations and communities that have historically been left out of engagement efforts, including home providers, indigenous populations, geographically isolated families, immigrants, and those where English is their second language. Early learning stakeholders are seeing that successful engagement with these audiences requires a foundation of cultural competency and a sustained approach. They are deploying culturally sensitive translation services to make early learning concepts meaningful to all audiences, pushing for interactive, two-way communication that allows families to be heard, and working to meet people where they are—physically and emotionally. ACS expects this trend to continue among both renewed and round one state grantees. In addition to state-specific work, ACS provided national webinars on this topic to dozens of PDG B-5 grantees through a national technical assistance provider. These webinars reinforced the need for discussion on this critical issue.

## Takeaway 2:

Early learning and education stakeholders must engage a broad array of partners who interact with children in multiple ways. ACS saw this in Louisiana, where the state helped early education leaders identify new stakeholders that reach families outside the education system, such as libraries, museums, parks

**Early learning stakeholders must engage with partners who interact with children outside the education system—such as libraries, parks & recreation departments, healthcare providers, & law enforcement agencies.**



and recreation departments, healthcare providers, and local government. To reach families sustainably and effectively over time, it is critical that:

**A)** Messages about the role and importance of early learning come from places and people beyond childcare providers and early childhood educators. The messenger matters greatly, and bringing more organizations and individuals in the door expands access to a pool of trusted messengers. (For help with coalition building no matter your area of work, [check out this ACS resource.](#))

**B)** Messengers use clear and consistent messages—this reduces the risk of sowing more confusion among families.

### Takeaway 3:

Do not forget the power of robust communication research. In helping conduct communication research in Michigan and Oklahoma, ACS was reminded of the importance of truly understanding one's audience before developing and deploying communication tactics. Good research uncovers what the audience already knows (or doesn't) about early learning, how they prefer to be engaged, and of course, what messages resonate best. For example, Oklahoma stakeholders learned that many rural families lack internet access, so digital communication tactics that increasingly work in other parts of the state were ineffective (this reinforced ACS' learnings from previous clients). Across the communication research, one finding remained consistent, stood out with implications for anyone working with or on behalf of children, and is a good reminder for everyone: *All families, regardless of location, background, or income, want to know that their children are in a safe, nurturing environment.*

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# K-12 Education

A presidential election year is here, and K-12 education is shaping up to be a hot topic among 2020 presidential candidates. Local and state races also are likely to highlight education policy, given its budget implications and relevance to many voters. While candidates will undoubtedly discuss a multitude of K-12 policy issues during the upcoming months, ACS expects the following two issues to take center stage and encourages readers to pay close attention to how these issues factor into races up and down the ticket.

## Teacher Pay

The [#RedforEd](#) movement, which advocates for teacher pay raises and additional resources for schools, gained steam in 2019 as teachers fought for more money and support in big cities like Los Angeles and Denver and states like Indiana and North and South Carolina. [One analysis](#) indicates the political pressure generated by these protests has been effective in helping teachers negotiate better salaries. Protests are likely to continue in 2020 in various places, potentially including Detroit and Philadelphia, where teachers' contracts are up this year. [#RedforEd](#) activism hasn't escaped the attention of some Democratic presidential hopefuls ([both Sen. Elizabeth Warren and Sen. Bernie Sanders have attended recent rallies and strikes](#)), whose participation may or may not be a savvy political move for them but is certain to grab mainstream media attention to the issue of teacher pay. It's worth noting that teacher pay is largely controlled at the local and state level, so while presidential candidates may have strong feelings (and may receive donations from organizations with strong feelings), they don't have a lot of control. Some Democratic candidates have



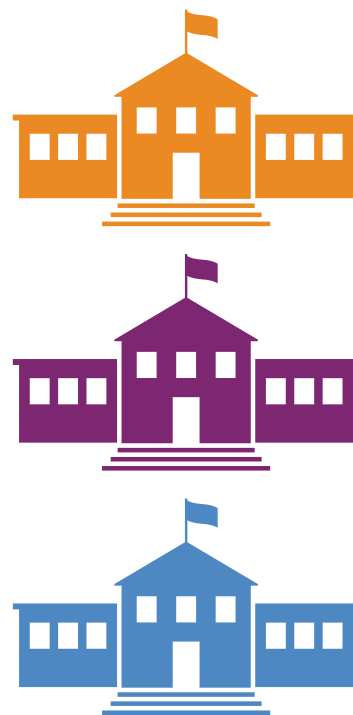
proposed big changes to Title I<sup>1</sup>, including setting minimum pay for teachers, but that would be a big lift. For the real action, watch local ballot initiatives and referenda on school funding, which often include teacher pay changes, and watch local races.

<sup>1</sup>Title I is part of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act and “provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families.” Learn more [here](#).

## School Choice

Both charter schools and school voucher programs are hot topics at the state and local level and likely will remain so throughout the year. The former are publicly funded independent schools, while the latter allow families to use public school funds to pay for tuition at private schools (including religious institutions).

In Ohio for example, the state’s voucher program, called EdChoice, has become increasingly contentious over the past year due to changes made by the state legislature in 2019 that broaden the definition under which a public school can be considered “low-performing” and thus have students who qualify for the voucher program. The program [allows](#) \$4,650 per student per year to go from public schools to pay for private school tuition for K-8 students, and \$6,000 per student for high school students. In 2019, that translated to a [\\$148 million](#) loss for public school budgets. Under the new requirements, more than 1,200 schools will have students who qualify for voucher use, up from 500 schools previously. Even EdChoice supporters are concerned about the impact on local school district budgets. Given the cost implications, it’s likely voters in Ohio (and in other states with similarly complex laws governing school choice) will pay close attention to local and state candidates’ positions on the issue as the election approaches.



Related to vouchers at the national level, there is a pending U.S. Supreme Court decision in [Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue](#) in which the court will consider whether Montana’s constitutional provision that prohibits education funds from going to religious schools violates the First Amendment’s guarantee of free exercise of religion. The case relates more

specifically to the state's \$150 tax credit for donations to a scholarship program for students attending private schools, including religious ones. The decision could have implications for the [18 other states](#) with similar tax credit programs, and potentially others with state legislatures interested in expanding school choice options. The decision is expected at the end of June 2020.

On the issue of charter schools, presidential candidates' positions will be especially interesting to watch as some current Democratic presidential candidates, including Senators Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, include defunding charter schools in their platforms, while others like former Vice President Joe Biden support eliminating funding for private charter schools. (For an up-to-date list of where each Democratic candidate stands on education policy, check out [this tracker](#) from Chalkbeat). President Donald Trump is strongly supportive of charter schools. His spending on federal charter grants has increased by more than [30 percent](#) since he took office in 2017; his 2020 proposed budget included an additional \$60 million for charter schools.

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## Want more?

Want to learn how communication, strategy development or advocacy can move your organization forward? Need an expert for training sessions or conference presentations? Contact one of our team members. Call toll free at **1-877-372-0166** or [visit our website](#).

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