



America's Essential Data at Risk: Preserve and Enhance the American Community Survey to Support U.S. Education Programs

Challenges Threaten America's Essential Data

Local communities, entrepreneurs, urban planners, major corporations, and thousands of others that depend on annual data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) were stunned late last year when both major annual data releases were delayed or replaced with experimental data due to quality issues. Years of underinvestment and the pandemic have degraded the data, precluded necessary increases in the survey's sample size, and shortchanged the Bureau's ability to address steadily declining response rates, revise content, and make other methodological and operational improvements. Stakeholders raised a clarion call for action.

What is the American Community Survey (ACS)

The [ACS](#), which replaced the census long form in 2005, is a nationwide, continuous survey of about 3.5 million households annually conducted by the [U.S. Census Bureau](#). It provides reliable and timely demographic, housing, social, and economic data every year for communities large and small. The ACS is the largest official survey of American households. In 2017, 316 federal spending programs distributed more than \$1.5 trillion to states and local areas on the basis, in whole or in part, of data derived from the ACS.

Pervasive Uses of ACS Data in U.S. Education Programs

ACS data inform the distribution of federal funding supporting various education programs benefitting young children and adults. For young children, these programs include:

- Head Start, which provides comprehensive early childhood education services to low-income children;
- National School Lunch Program, which provides free or reduced-price lunches for eligible students;
- Title 1, which awards grants to local school districts in low-income areas; and
- Special Education, which supports programs serving children with physical, learning, language, or behavior disorders.

In addition, ACS data inform the allocation of higher education and vocational program funding, including tuition assistance, such as PELL grants, aid for land grant and historically black colleges and universities, and adult education.

Census Stakeholders Urge Congress to Support Long Delayed Enhancements

In March 2022, The Census Project, a coalition of over 800 national, state, and local organizations, released [a report](#), documenting the many uses of the ACS and identifying its challenges. It calls for an urgent national initiative to ensure the ACS can deliver what the nation needs.

- An infusion of **\$100 to \$300 million** is urgently needed to protect the ACS from further data quality deficiencies, increase the survey's sample size, enhance non-response follow up operations, reduce respondent burden, and develop new data products.
- New questions and survey content are needed to ensure the ACS is accurately capturing data about the nation's increasingly complex population and households.

Learn More at: [ACS: America's Data at Risk – The Census Project – www.thecensusproject.org](https://www.thecensusproject.org)

