

Help Feed Michigan's Kids: One Census Form at a Time

The mandatory closing of Michigan's schools for coronavirus safety has brought to light the plight of the approximately 20,000 students who rely on the school free-lunch program for their mid-day meal. Some of these students even count on these programs for breakfast and dinner, which is why communities are working tirelessly to find ways to make sure these children continue to receive the nutritious meals they depend upon while schools are temporarily closed.

So, how can you help make sure these students receive the meals they need to maintain good health? There are several ways, but one easy way you can contribute is to fill out the 2020 Census, and count the kids who live with you. Census data impacts the amount of federal funds that communities receive each year for a variety of programs and services that are critical for schools, students and younger children. These include:

- Food assistance, including free and reduced-price school lunches through the National School Lunch Program, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that provides food assistance for families
- Special education, Head Start, after-school programs and K-12 education programs, and maternal and child health programs.

All of these programs are vital to the health of our kids and communities.

SNAP, which was previously known as Food Stamps, provides nutrition benefits to help supplement the food budget of families who meet income guidelines. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, SNAP receives approximately \$71 billion a year in federal funds that help families purchase food for healthy and nutritious meals.

The National School Lunch Program was originally based in cities but has since grown to become a nationwide, government-funded school program. All U.S. schools provide free or reduced-price meals to students whose family meet certain financial thresholds. Also, some schools offer meals at no cost to all of their students if at least 40% of them receive SNAP and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) assistance, a program also funded based on census data.

The Census Bureau offers guidelines for counting young children, especially if their parents have a shared custody arrangement or if they spend some time at relatives' homes. Young children should be counted in the home where they live and sleep most of the time. If a child splits their time equally between two residences, they should be counted at where they are on April 1. Also, a newborn should be counted if they were born on or before April 1, 2020.

Another demographic that is often not counted is children who live in homes where English is a second language. According to the Census Bureau, children living in homes where the adults have limited English-speaking skills, or who are living in poverty, are also more likely to not be counted in the census.

Being accurate in your 2020 Census submission means getting a complete count of all Michigan kids, which will help Michigan obtain its fair share of federal funding to help our kids grow and thrive, especially those in need of assistance.