

CensusAtSchool - Developments in Australia

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1. Introduction

The CensusAtSchool project is an initiative undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) aimed at encouraging the development of statistical literacy amongst 10 - 16 year old students across Australia. It offers the potential for an engaging learning experience for students. This will be achieved through providing a rich data set for learning and appropriate support materials on a web site. The project will also be used to promote the 2006 Census of Population and Housing; the general awareness raising of census processes, the uses of census data and to raise the profile of the ABS.

2. Background

The ABS has decided to conduct a CensusAtSchool project to compliment the other international and local CensusAtSchool projects. The CensusAtSchool project has previously been conducted in Queensland (titled CensusAtSchool) and a similar project conducted in South Australia (titled SeniorSchoolCensus-Online). Both of these projects have decided not to run data collections in 2006 given ABS national involvement. Instead, the organisations are working collaboratively with the ABS to develop the Australia-wide project. The ABS CensusAtSchool project will model census processes, particularly the online collection processes planned for the 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

3. How CensusAtSchool will work in Australia

The ABS CensusAtSchool project will be delivered online, via the ABS web site.

Schools wishing to participate in the project are required to apply for a school participation number. Student Access Numbers (SAN) will then be issued to schools. Similar to other CensusAtSchool projects, the Random Sampler will be available to students online and a csv file provided through an automated response. The remainder of the web site will consist of information sheets, ideas for teacher use of the data and student activities that use the CensusAtSchool data.

4. Project Governance Board

The CensusAtSchool project is overseen by a Project Board consisting of 4 senior ABS Statisticians. The Project Board meets on a quarterly basis to discuss and approve issues relating to the Project.

5. Key Stakeholders - Education Intermediaries

ABS recognises the important role education intermediaries could undertake in the project to provide a perspective from the teachers in each State/Territory. Assistance was sought from the

education intermediaries to develop the content and output plans, and also in the promotion of the project to schools, teachers and students. Positive responses have been received from all education intermediaries (Government, Catholic and Independent sectors). A Reference Group consisting of 5 representations from the education intermediaries has been established to provide advice to the CensusAtSchool project Team.

6. The links to Australian Curriculum

Curriculum in Australia is determined on an individual State/Territory basis. This means that a project such as CensusAtSchool needs to map to 8 separate curricula in each key learning area. ABS has established contacts with all Australian education jurisdictions to seek their input in preparing a project that is relevant and useful to their teachers and to make the curriculum links. For 2006 the project will focus on the Mathematics and Studies of Society and Environment key learning areas. Later projects may well focus on other learning areas. To facilitate curriculum relevance the questions used focus on yielding data that is directly applicable in these key learning areas. Australian curriculum is moving towards being outcome based and so the focus of the activities will be on supporting teachers to achieve those outcomes. An example activity and its links to curriculum outcomes will be presented.

7. The support materials

The support materials that are in the process of being developed will consist of:

- Learning materials for school based statistics
- Simple interactive learning tools
- Census related materials
- Student activities for students to use the data
- Links to relevant sites

The support materials will provide a good starting point for student research about census and statistics. It will be an engaging way for teachers to introduce statistics to primary and early secondary school age students.

The support materials will be in a form that can be readily used by students and teachers. Where appropriate documents will be in MSWord and MSEXcel formats for ease of use by students and teachers. Copies of the administrative materials that schools may need will also be provided to minimise the workload on teachers.

Examples of the learning materials and tools will be presented.

8. Promotion

A Marketing/Communication plan has been developed with the view of staging an intensive promotion and awareness raising campaign in the run up to the 2006 Census. Promotional work will commence in the first half of 2005. The first CensusAtSchool newsletter has already been released with a special message from The Statistician.

9. Potential for the future

The intention is for CensusAtSchool to become an ongoing ABS project with a data collection being conducted with every census and once between.

The CensusAtSchool project has significant potential for the ABS to improve the statistical literacy of students in Australia. The opportunity exists to influence teachers and statistics curriculum in a practical way through the provision of a resource that can be readily used. The relevance of statistics, across a wide range of curriculum areas, can be demonstrated.

The potential also exists to extend the project to be inclusive of Census of Population and Housing data when it becomes available in 2007. ABS is in the process of providing its data online and accessible to a wider range of customers. CensusAtSchool could also be a launching pad into other data products that could be of interest to schools.