

Guidelines for Parent and Student Self-Identification of Ethnicity and Race

According to federal guidelines, parents are the best source of information on their children's ethnicity and race. The guidance specifies that at the elementary and secondary level, the identification of a student's racial and ethnic categories is made primarily by parents or guardians. A high school student *may* self-identify his or her race and ethnicity categories (NCES, *Managing an Identity Crisis*, page 35), although it is recommended that the parent or guardian select ethnicity and race categories for students who are not yet of high school age.

If a parent refuses to identify the ethnicity of race of a student, but the student later volunteers this information, use the categories that the student has self-identified, unless it is impractical to do so. Responses such as "other," "multi-racial," "more than one," and so on, cannot be used for data collection. However, parents, guardians, and students may self-identify with as many categories on the collect form as apply to them.

There may be situations where both parent and student volunteer information, but the student's self-identification differs from the parent or guardian. Use the categories selected by the parent/guardian for the student record.

According to NCES Guide, *Managing an Identity Crisis: A Forum Guide to Implementing the New Federal Race and Ethnicity Categories*:

The actual re-identification may be accomplished in different ways....since the Final Guidance indicates that the selection of a student's race and ethnicity is primarily made by parents or guardians...it is preferable to send the form to parents, asking them to identify the student's race and ethnicity, and then to sign and return the form. If a school district traditionally obtains data more quickly and accurately from high school students than from their parents, it would be preferable to ask students to provide this information themselves (page 26).

Other things to keep in mind:

Self-identification is Preferable to Observer Identification.

Self-Identification is based on how people define themselves and their children. It is the preferred choice of selecting an individual's ethnicity and race because self-identification allows individuals to assert their own racial and ethnic identity. However there is no legal requirement for individuals to make these selections if they choose not to.

Observer-identification is required as a last resort.

The federal government requires the use of observer identification of students' ethnicity and race, as a last resort, if such information is not provided by parents/guardians, or students. If parents are reluctant to identify their children's ethnicity and race, they should be informed that observer identification will be used if they refuse to self-identify. Follow-up steps if parents choose not to self-identify include reviewing the enrollment form with the parent at registration, sending a second letter, or making a phone call to parents.

Observer identification can be based in part on first-hand knowledge about the student, family, or community, teacher's or counselor's records, the student's or parent's country of birth, home language or preferred language. Prior records or the records of siblings can also inform this process.

Missing data are to be avoided.

What to do if you think that students are of a different ethnicity or race than they or their parents claim.

School personnel are to accept an individual's self-identification of his/her ethnicity and race. Self-identification is a basic principle underlying these changes. For students who are under 18, parents or guardians will generally select the ethnicity and race categories. Observers should **never** tell parents or students how to classify themselves.