

Guidelines for Observer Identification of New Ethnicity and Race Codes

Principle 1: Self-identification is Preferable to Observer Identification

Self-Identification is based on how people define themselves and their children, and is the preferred choice of selecting an individual's ethnicity and race. 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. The [sample data collection form](#) may be used by districts to ask parents or guardians to select their child's ethnicity and race.

Principle 2: 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 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. Observers should **never** tell parents or students how to classify themselves.

Self-identification is the best way to collect data, but we recognize that it is not always possible. All observers should be trained on the procedures for ethnic and race identification. A good practice is to designate one key person who can respond to questions about the observation process to select ethnicity and race on students' behalf. This will also improve the quality of data collection.

As an observer, try to stay within your own comfort zones. Attempt visual identification if you are comfortable doing so. Supporting information, such as personal information from a teacher or knowledge about the community may be helpful. Rely first on existing information before you actually "observe" the ethnicity or race of the student, but check your sources of information for reliability. Try for consistency and objectivity to the best of your ability.

Observers may use the examples below to help identify race on students' behalf:

Students whose families are from:	May consider themselves, or be considered:
Croatia, France, Italy, Greece, Norway, Russia, Serbia, Sweden, Ukraine, or other European countries	White
Afghanistan, Egypt, Israel, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Yemen, or other Middle Eastern countries	White
Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, or other North African countries	White
Haiti, Jamaica, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, or other West Indian or African countries	Black
Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Punjab, Sri Lanka, or other Asian countries	Other Asian
The indigenous peoples of Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea or other Pacific Islands	Other Pacific Islander
The indigenous peoples of North, Central, South, or Latin American (those not choosing one of the 28 federally-recognized state tribes)	Other American Indian

Sample Questions from Parents:

Q: Why do you need this information?

A: The demographics of our society have changed dramatically in the last few decades. This information will allow parents to describe themselves and their children more accurately. The federal government requires all states and school districts to use the new categories for reporting ethnicity and race. We report this information for funding and evaluation, as well as for civil rights compliance. We use ethnic and race data to evaluate instructional needs, so we can provide the best education for all students.

Q: Will this data be used to check my immigration status?

A: No. This information will be kept in student records. It is not reported to any federal agency in a way that identifies you or your child. No one will check for immigration status from the information you give here.

Q: Will the school release my student's ethnicity and race to anyone else?

A: Individual student records and privacy are protected by the Federal Education Records and Privacy Act (FERPA). The new ethnicity and race standards have no effect on FERPA's protection of student records. Ethnicity and race of individual students are not directory information. They are not to be published or shared.

Q: I am Hispanic. Why do I have to answer more questions?

A: Hispanic people can be of different races. We would like to provide Hispanic and Latino individuals a better way to describe themselves. So yes, you will be asked to select one or more races, even if you have indicated that you are Hispanic or Latino.

Sample Questions from Staff:

Q: What should we do if an individual self-identifies as Hispanic/Latino, but does not answer the part of the question about race?

A: The Federal requirement separate ethnicity and race. Correspondence and forms need to explain that these are two parts of one question. Follow up for racial identification will be needed in many cases. As a last resort, an observer may fill in the information.

Q: What should we do if we think that students are of a different ethnicity or race than they claim to be?

A: You must 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 select the ethnicity and race categories. If a parent refuses to identify the ethnicity or race of a student, but the student later volunteers this information, use the student's self-identification.

There may be situations where a student's self-identification differs from the parent or guardian. Use the categories selected by the parent/guardian for the student record.

Q: What should we do if parents refuse to self-identify using the new ethnicity and race categories?

A: As a last resort, look for this information in existing student records. If these sources are not available, the observer may rely on visual observation for the purpose of selecting one or more ethnicity and one or more race categories.