

“Where Have All the Children Gone?”

Applied Demography Poster

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Abstract

A California public school district asked us why Census 2000 counted far more school-aged children within its boundaries than were enrolled in the district's schools. One of the school district's trustees did a census analysis and found 5,072 potential students with 1,614 students not enrolled in district public schools. This was a critical issue because the district was considering closing one or more schools. If indeed there were additional students that could be brought back to the public schools, either because they were attending private schools or not attending school at all, perhaps the district could avoid closing a school. We did our own census analysis and solved the mystery of the missing children. After proper data comparisons were made and normal levels of private school enrollments were considered, the Census and school district enrollments matched well.

Extended abstract:

The poster will visually display data about the school situation, such as:

- GIS maps of private school enrollment by Census tract and estimates of expected private school enrollment levels
- GIS maps of student enrollment
- Enrollment history of the district
- Recent migration trends in the district
- Effect of a middle school charter on district enrollments
- Data on inter-district transfer students

Some details:

- The district serves kindergartners through 12th graders and is located in a rural canyon along a two-lane highway.
- The decrease in enrolled students was causing a budget crisis. School officials were under pressure to cut costs and were considering whether to close a school.

Our Methods vs. the School Trustee's:

- The school trustee estimated the district's Census 2000 population by using census tracts adjusted to the size of the district adding or subtracting block groups and blocks. We used a GIS system to select all the blocks within the district. Using our system we found less school-aged children in the district than the trustee had found.

- The school trustee used age groups to estimate the number of potential students between the ages of 5 and 17. We used SF-1 data by single years of age, which was more accurate.
- The school trustee counted the students enrolled in the state enrollment database (CBEDS) for the 2002-03 school year. We used CBEDS data for the 1999-2000 school year instead because they better matched Census 2000 data collected in April 2000.
- We identified 227 resident students attending public school in other districts by using the district's inter-district transfer permit records.
- We also found that some students in the district were attending charter schools or were home-schooled.
- We estimated that 529 district residents attended private school (based on SF-3 Census long form rates for the district). We compared the district's private school enrollment rates with those of nearby school districts.

In the end we found that there was not a missing children problem, but a problem with data comparison methods.