



January 14, 2025

---

Dear Colleague:

We are writing to provide you with information about recent changes to the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive No. 15 (SPD 15), which sets forth the federal standards for the maintenance, collection, and reporting of racial and ethnic data.<sup>1</sup> These revisions are applicable to all federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Education (the Department). It is critical that the Department, its grantees, tribal governments, and other stakeholders begin a dialogue to plan for these changes and their implications for data collections and data systems. We are coordinating with other federal agencies to help ensure that implementation of these revisions is consistent across the government.

Implementing these new race and ethnicity data standards ("new standards") will lead to more accurate and useful reporting on race and ethnicity, and bring additional insights into how individuals participating in educational programs and institutions identify themselves. In turn, these new data will enable education agencies, postsecondary institutions, and the Department to gather valuable insights to inform policy and priorities. It is important that all federal agencies implement these new standards by the compliance date of March 28, 2029, to ensure the comparability of race and ethnicity data across federal data sources.

We are sending this letter to share basic details about the new standards; to provide a brief overview of actions currently planned to implement the standards within the Department; and to provide action steps that the Department grantees, tribal governments, and other stakeholders can take, starting now, to prepare for the transition to the new standards and their implications for Departmental collections.

## Changes to the Standards

OMB revised the previous standards for the collection of data on race and ethnicity in five primary ways:

1. Shifting from a two-question format for collecting race and ethnicity to one single combined race and ethnicity question, allowing multiple responses.
  - Addresses concerns regarding the data quality for Hispanic and Latino respondents when using the two-question format.
  - Includes guidance to data collectors and modifications to question instructions.
2. Adding Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) as a minimum reporting category, separate and distinct from the White category.
  - Allows respondents of Middle Eastern and North African background, who view their identity as distinct from the White racial category, to report themselves separately.

---

<sup>1</sup> See [Federal Register notice](#), 89 Fed. Reg. 22182 (March 29, 2024).

- Includes a definition for the overall response category, as well as more detailed subcategories for consideration.
- 3. Requiring the collection of information beyond the minimum race and ethnicity reporting categories as a default.
  - Addresses a need for additionally disaggregated data to better understand within-group differences.
  - Clarifies the expectation that an agency must request and receive an exemption from OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) to not collect additional detail in a particular collection, for example, because the potential benefit of the detailed data would not justify the additional burden to the agency and/or the public given the purpose of the collection, or there is risk to privacy or confidentiality introduced by the detail.
- 4. Updating terminology used within the data standards.
  - The last revision to the standards, made October 30, 1997,<sup>2</sup> included both inconsistent and now outdated terminology.
  - Revisions provide updated definitions for racial/ethnic categories.
- 5. Making recommendations on implementation guidance.
  - Requires agency-specific implementation action plans.
  - Sets timelines for when all federal agency-conducted or sponsored collections must be updated.

While the format that data submitters should use to report aggregated data to the Department has yet to be determined (see item 3 above about considerations and waivers), we are sharing figures after the signature page of this letter that are from the Federal Register OMB notice announcing the new standards. The figures show question formats that comply with the new standards. The OMB notice envisions that, whenever possible, agencies will collect race and ethnicity data with a question format that includes the maximum level of detail possible. Within the Department, we are discussing the potential issues that could result from use of the more detailed categories across our aggregate collections. The Department recognizes that use of a format that includes the minimum categories for future data collections in which race/ethnicity data are reported in aggregate would be more closely aligned to current reporting instructions. The Department encourages all data submitters to have their own internal and external discussion about collecting data at the greatest level of detail to meet their needs.

## Next Steps for the Department

The Department is required to create an Action Plan on Race and Ethnicity Data (Action Plan) for submission to OMB by September 29, 2025. The Action Plan will describe how the Department intends to bring new and existing information collections and publications into compliance with the SPD 15 revisions through OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs' Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA) clearance process.

The Department is taking steps now to gather input from stakeholders regarding the Action Plan and to identify the next steps to enable the Department to begin collecting data under the new standards as soon as possible. Specifically, the Department has established internal working groups to develop the Action Plan; to develop and implement strategies for outreach to stakeholders and tribal governments,

---

<sup>2</sup> See [Federal Register notice, 62 Fed. Reg. 58782 \(October 30, 1997\)](#).

including data providers; and to assess implications for implementation and research. We have also initiated plans to transition some data collections that include direct responses to questions about race and ethnicity to the new standards. In addition, we have begun to include directed questions for data submitters and other stakeholders in some information collection requests to learn more about those collections that include questions about race and ethnicity. In the coming months, the Department will have more information to share with you and other stakeholders about plans for specific data collections. The Department will also continue to seek input through multiple channels, including tribal consultation,<sup>3</sup> soliciting comments on proposed, revised, and continuing collections of information (via Directed Questions in Information Collection Requests), use of the Common Education Data Standards Open Source Community as a venue for sharing technical information on implementing changes to both federal and non-federal data processes, and holding listening sessions with stakeholder groups to gather questions, concerns, and recommendations. The Department will consider statutory authority for each data collection to collect race/ethnicity data; implications for Department processes such as program monitoring, accountability provisions, and eligibility determinations, where race/ethnicity subgroups may need to be compared over time; privacy protections that might be needed for subgroups that are smaller in size; and the usability of data with additional privacy protections applied. The Department also anticipates at a later date to share best practices for implementation, including strategies to bridge trend data and use information made available within the Common Education Data Standards Open Source Community to support implementation of the new standards.

## Action Steps to Consider

The Department recognizes that implementing the SPD 15 revisions will require changes to data collection procedures, data routines, data quality checks, and information systems at all levels of data management.

In the coming weeks, the Department will publish responses to frequently asked questions, along with other links and resources on the [ED.gov SPD15 webpage](#). Immediate action steps you may want to consider taking include:

- Reviewing the new standards and sharing information about them with:
  - Officials using data products today that are dependent upon racial/ethnic data, so they can plan for the new reporting categories in coming years.
  - Data collectors that interact with data collection respondents.
  - Data system staff, so they can consider contract and resource implications for making changes to collection and reporting systems.
  - Product developers, so they can consider how to adapt data products.
  - Stakeholders who use racial/ethnic data.
- Considering and beginning to plan for changes needed to how your agency or institution collects and manages information on the race and ethnicity of students, teachers, and other individuals within the education community to meet the needs of revised Department collections.

---

<sup>3</sup> As implemented through Executive Order 13175 - Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments; Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships (2021); Memorandum on Uniform Standards for Tribal Consultation (2022), Executive Order on Reforming Federal Funding and Support for Tribal Nations to Better Embrace Our Trust Responsibilities and Promote the Next Era of Tribal Self-Determination (2023)

- Sending any questions or feedback that you have on this topic to [SPD15@ed.gov](mailto:SPD15@ed.gov), contacting 1-800-USA-LEARN, and/or participating in opportunities to provide input, outlined earlier in this document.

Important dates related to the SPD-15 race/ethnicity revisions:

- March 28, 2024 – New standards were published.
- September 29, 2025 – An Action Plan, which will include Department plans to bring all data collections into compliance with the new standards, will be finalized and submitted to OMB.
- March 28, 2029 – All Department data collections must comply with the new standards (i.e., data about School Year 2028–29).

For more information, see:

- *The Department's [SPD 15 webpage](#)*
- *OMB's official [SPD 15 revision information site](#)*
- *The [Federal Register](#) notice with full details on the updates*
- *Blog posts by Dr. Karen Orvis, Chief Statistician of the United States*
  - *[OMB Publishes Revisions to Statistical Policy Directive No. 15: Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity](#) (March 28, 2024)*
  - *[OMB's 2024 Revisions to SPD No. 15 Are Final. What's Happening Now?](#) (October 16, 2024)*

Should you have further questions about the new standards or its requirements for the collection of data on race and ethnicity, please contact [SPD15@ed.gov](mailto:SPD15@ed.gov) or 1-800-USA-LEARN.

Sincerely,

Roberto J. Rodríguez  
Assistant Secretary for Planning,  
Evaluation and Policy Development  
U.S. Department of Education

Peggy G. Carr, PhD  
Commissioner of the National  
Center for Education Statistics  
U.S. Department of Education

Enclosure

## Question Format Guidance from the Office of Management and Budget

The following three figures provide illustrative examples of question formats that comply with SPD 15; the figures themselves are provided for planning purposes and are not final federal guidance. The standards do not specify the order that responses must be presented, but agencies typically order the responses alphabetically, as shown, or by population size. SPD 15 envisions that whenever possible agencies will collect race and ethnicity data with a question format that includes the required minimum categories disaggregated by the required detailed categories as illustrated in Figure 1.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 1. Race and Ethnicity Question with Minimum Categories, Multiple Detailed Checkboxes, and Write-In Response Areas with Example Groups

**What is your race and/or ethnicity?**  
*Select all that apply and enter additional details in the spaces below.*

**American Indian or Alaska Native** – Enter, for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation of Montana, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, Aztec, Maya, etc.

**Asian** – Provide details below.

<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian Indian	<input type="checkbox"/> Filipino
<input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese	<input type="checkbox"/> Korean	<input type="checkbox"/> Japanese

Enter, for example, Pakistani, Hmong, Afghan, etc.

**Black or African American** – Provide details below.

<input type="checkbox"/> African American	<input type="checkbox"/> Jamaican	<input type="checkbox"/> Haitian
<input type="checkbox"/> Nigerian	<input type="checkbox"/> Ethiopian	<input type="checkbox"/> Somali

Enter, for example, Trinidadian and Tobagonian, Ghanaian, Congolese, etc.

**Hispanic or Latino** – Provide details below.

<input type="checkbox"/> Mexican	<input type="checkbox"/> Puerto Rican	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvadoran
<input type="checkbox"/> Cuban	<input type="checkbox"/> Dominican	<input type="checkbox"/> Guatemalan

Enter, for example, Colombian, Honduran, Spaniard, etc.

**Middle Eastern or North African** – Provide details below.

<input type="checkbox"/> Lebanese	<input type="checkbox"/> Iranian	<input type="checkbox"/> Egyptian
<input type="checkbox"/> Syrian	<input type="checkbox"/> Iraqi	<input type="checkbox"/> Israeli

Enter, for example, Moroccan, Yemeni, Kurdish, etc.

**Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander** – Provide details below.

<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian	<input type="checkbox"/> Samoan	<input type="checkbox"/> Chamorro
<input type="checkbox"/> Tongan	<input type="checkbox"/> Fijian	<input type="checkbox"/> Marshallese

Enter, for example, Chuukese, Palauan, Tahitian, etc.

**White** – Provide details below.

<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> German	<input type="checkbox"/> Irish
<input type="checkbox"/> Italian	<input type="checkbox"/> Polish	<input type="checkbox"/> Scottish

Enter, for example, French, Swedish, Norwegian, etc.

<sup>4</sup> See [source for the Question Format Guidance](#)

When an agency receives an OIRA exemption from collecting detailed data, it may use a format that includes only the minimum categories, as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

Figure 2. Race and Ethnicity Question with Minimum Categories Only and Examples

**What is your race and/or ethnicity?**  
*Select all that apply.*

**American Indian or Alaska Native**  
*For example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation of Montana, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, Aztec, Maya, etc.*

**Asian**  
*For example, Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, etc.*

**Black or African American**  
*For example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, etc.*

**Hispanic or Latino**  
*For example, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, Cuban, Dominican, Guatemalan, etc.*

**Middle Eastern or North African**  
*For example, Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi, Israeli, etc.*

**Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander**  
*For example, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, etc.*

**White**  
*For example, English, German, Irish, Italian, Polish, Scottish, etc.*

Figure 3. Race and Ethnicity Question with Minimum Categories Only

**What is your race and/or ethnicity?**  
*Select all that apply.*

**American Indian or Alaska Native**

**Asian**

**Black or African American**

**Hispanic or Latino**

**Middle Eastern or North African**

**Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander**

**White**

When using the minimum categories only, the quality of the data and consistency with other datasets may be improved by providing the respondent with examples as shown in Figure 2. Agencies should provide these examples when feasible over the example in Figure 3 without examples.