November 1, 2019

Re: Russellville City Schools Supports 2020 Census

Dear RCS Parents & School Community,

More than $800 billion are on the line in one of the biggest events of the summer of 2020! No, it’s not the lottery, it’s the 2020 census and getting an accurate count in this year’s census is extremely important to our community and especially our school system.

The goal of the census is to accurately count every person living in the United States and collect their demographic data such as their age, relationships, heads of households, annual income etc. This information helps in many important decisions, including how many congressional representatives each state can send to Washington to represent not only the people of Alabama but also, and in particular, the people in Franklin County. Without adequate representation in Washington, our collective voices in Franklin County and Russellville City will not be heard, and the amount of monetary resources for our area will be drastically cut from the federal governmental programs we currently enjoy. These programs include educational platforms for our students.

An accurate census is key to our schools getting the funding we need to serve every child who walks through our doors. We only have one shot every 10 years to get the census right. For those in our community with children and grandchildren, ask yourself “how old will my child or grandchild be in 10 years?”. Our children are counting on us, as adults and their parents, to get the job done. Here’s what you need to know, and how you can help:

**Why is the census so critical to public schools?**

Census data determines the distribution of:

- More than $14 billion in Title I grants that help schools serve more than 24 million students from low-income families; Russellville City Schools receives about $1.3 million for title programs that go directly to the classroom to aid our students.

- $11.3 billion in special education grants to the states; Russellville City Schools receives about $940,000 from this amount that goes directly into our special education classrooms.

- About $13.6 billion for the National School Lunch Program; All students in Russellville City Schools have enjoyed two years of free breakfast and lunches every day as part of this program. This is a program we need to keep.

- Plus funds for the Head Start preschool (pre-k) program, grants to improve teacher quality and grants for our after-school programs all come from federal dollars to our system based on census data. We desperately need to keep our pre-k and after-school programs and to keep those costs as low as possible for our community families.
All told, more than 130 critical government programs serving primarily low-income people use census data to allocate millions of government dollars for our area. This includes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which keeps millions of families out of poverty and has lasting benefits for children’s health and academic success.

If our people aren’t accurately represented in the census, it will be more difficult for us to cover the needs that exist in our schools and community. Our schools, which are not funded to the same levels as comparable schools in other states, will be even further underfunded. The resulting lack of resources will negatively impact all students in our school system.

**What do we need you to do?**

We need you to do your part and accurately report the persons living in your household this spring and summer. It is important for you to know that federal law requires the Census Bureau to keep everyone’s information confidential. By law, your responses cannot be used against you by any government agency or court in any way. The Census Bureau will not share your responses with immigration enforcement agencies, law enforcement agencies, or allow that information to be used to determine eligibility for government benefits. Title 13 under United States code makes it very clear that the data collected can only be used for statistical purposes. Your data cannot be used for anything else, including use by law enforcement. You will have the option of responding online, by mail, or by phone. More specific information about these reporting venues will be forthcoming in the early spring of 2020. Households that don’t respond in one of these ways will be visited by a census taker to collect the information in person. Regardless of how you respond, your personal information is protected by law, and we need you to accurately report in order to sustain our current educational programs for your children and grandchildren.

Sincerely,
Heath Grimes
Superintendent, RCS