



**WELDON COOPER  
CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE**  
*University of Virginia*

- In 2009, research professionals from the Weldon Cooper Center conducted an independent, public service study of the triennial census of the school-age population. The long-standing triennial census required each school division to conduct and bear the costs of conducting every three years a census of all children ages 5 – 19, whether or not the children were enrolled in the public schools. Eighteen and 19-year olds enrolled in college were also included and may have been counted both in the locality where they were attending college and in the locality where their parents resided. Some adjustments to the count were required to address the situations of persons living in orphanages, federal military reservations, state hospitals, mental institutions, and state or federal correctional institutions. While the Code allowed divisions to contract out the collection of the data, an actual count (as opposed to a count plus estimates) was required.
- The Cooper Center study found that, among the localities we studied, two-thirds undercounted their 5 – 19 population, resulting in the allocation of less funding to those localities than would be justified by the stipulations in the Code. In addition, uneven counting practices resulted in an unequal dollars-per-child allocation of the state sales and use tax, with a range from a low of \$582 dollars per child to \$928 dollars per child.
- A final concern about the triennial census was the costs to localities of conducting the census – estimated in 2008 to range from \$100 (Powhatan) to \$717,000 (Fairfax).
- Our conclusion was that conducting an accurate census of the school-age population is a complex and difficult task, and school divisions often lack the resources and expertise to complete the census properly. We recommended a number of alternatives to the triennial census requirement in our report on this study.
- In 2010, the General Assembly, through HB 669 and SB 413, directed the Weldon Cooper Center to develop estimates of the school-age population (ages 5 – 19) for Virginia’s 136 school divisions and 190 towns. As directed by legislation, the Cooper Center estimates are to be developed annually and used in the allocation to localities of 1.125% of the state sales and use tax.
- In addition to carrying forward the required adjustments for selected populations described above, General Assembly action in 2010 directed that students under the age of 20 who are attending college be counted in the locality where their parents reside.

- The first set of school-age population estimates were developed for July 1, 2010, using the recently concluded decennial census as the baseline for making the estimates. The estimates were communicated to the Virginia Department of Education on June 24, 2011, to Susan Hogge and Sarah Herzog, and posted on our website on July 6, 2011 – following the release of the estimates to the divisions by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The Superintendent's memo included this language:

*"Due to the 2010 statutory changes, school divisions are not required to conduct a triennial census count during summer 2011. The 2008 triennial census count will continue to be used for the distribution of sales tax through fiscal year 2012. Local funding distributions based on the new school-age population estimates will not be released until December 2011, when the Governor's 2012-2014 introduced budget is released. Prior to implementation of the school-age population estimates in the 2012-2014 budget, school divisions are asked to contact the Weldon Cooper Center with questions about the estimate for their locality during the period July 6 through September 30, 2011."*

- The posting on the Cooper Center website included the data table for all divisions including:
  - The April 1, 2010 decennial census count benchmark
  - The July 1, 2010 Cooper Center estimates (including adjustments)
  - The special education child count from VDOE
  - The total population estimate for sale tax distribution
- The posting also included this caution for data users:

*"Data users should be aware that while the July 1 population estimates are benchmarked on the April 1, 2010 Census count of 5-19 year olds, the estimates also incorporate a residency rules adjustment required by the Code of Virginia. The April 1, 2010 Census counts include people at their usual residence (where they live and sleep most of the time). The July 1, 2010 population estimates assign persons who attend institutions of higher education and persons confined in state or federal correctional institutions to the school division where the parents or legal guardians reside. After adjusting for the residency of youth attending college or in correctional facilities, some localities - especially those with colleges - are likely to have fewer 5-19 year-olds than the number reported in the 2010 decennial census count."*

- And this language:

*"The inquiry period for school divisions and incorporated towns is July 6 - Sept. 30, 2011. Division and town representatives may contact Susan Clapp at 434.982.5690 or [susan.clapp@virginia.edu](mailto:susan.clapp@virginia.edu) with questions about the estimates, including the methodology and the composition of the adjustments made to the initial estimates."*

- During the inquiry period, the Weldon Cooper Center responded to inquiries from Williamsburg City, Colonial Beach/Westmoreland town, Lawrenceville town, Gordonsville town, King William County, and Suffolk City. We also met on July 20 with several stakeholders, including representatives from VML, VACo, Charlottesville City Schools, Richmond City Schools, the Mayor's Office in Richmond, and the Thomas Jefferson PDC. During the inquiry period, only one school division, Williamsburg City Public Schools, formally requested a revised estimate and submitted the necessary data for the revision. The Williamsburg City estimate was increased from 771 to 1,008 school-age children.
- Following the inquiry period, the final July 1, 2010 school-age population estimates were posted on our website on October 5, 2011.

Additional notes:

A June 20, 2011 memorandum was sent to the Governor and all members of the General Assembly announcing the availability of the estimates (although estimate release was delayed until July 6th at the request of VDOE).

Estimates of the school-age population were also developed for 190 towns in Virginia for apportionment of local sales tax funds.