

April 16 Podcast Transcript

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Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Hi, I'm Eloy Ortiz Oakley, chancellor of the California Community Colleges, and you're listening to another episode of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Podcast. Today, we're going to be talking about Census 2020 and how important it is to the state of California and to the students of the California community colleges. As many of you know, every 10 years, people across the country fill out the census in order to have an accurate count of all the people living in the U.S. The census helps determine California's congressional districts and provides resources such as funding for some student financial aid, resources for healthcare, housing, transportation and other important student services. The census also helps to reassign seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, ensuring that our state's share of representation in Washington, D.C. is as great as it could be. Because we need all the help that we can get in the state of California right now.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

There's a lot to be said about the census and how important it is so in order to do that I have invited two very special guests to help me unpack Census 2020 and all of the efforts that California is making to reach all of our students, faculty, staff, and every Californian throughout the state. With me today is Marivel Servin, a community organizer and journalist, and Ditas Katague, census director for the state of California. Welcome to both of you.

Ditas Katague:

Great. Thank you so much, glad to be here, chancellor.

Marivel Servin:

Yeah, thank you for having us. It's a really great opportunity.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Absolutely. Thank you all. I know that even though we're in this public health crisis, we're all sort of hunkering down at home, it's critically important that everyone have all the information necessary about the census, so thank you to both of you for taking time out of your busy schedules to be with us today. Dedus, let me start with you. Tell us, how is Census 2020 going so far?

Ditas Katague:

Well as you know we started this work early on. You joined the California Complete Count Committee over two years ago, so we've been working really hard with our partners and California currently has a household self-response rate of 45.5%. That's as of April 6. That basically means that more than 6.8 million households have already responded to the census form. That's out of 15 million households that we have here in California, but California has the greatest number of households responding to the census form compared to other states, although if you look online, you know the percentages, but 1% in California is way more than 1% in Rhode Island or a smaller state.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

It sounds like people are responding. What is your goal from the state of California? 100% everybody being counted I assume"

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Ditas Katague :

The U.S. Census Bureau's goal of course is they count 100% of all residents living here in the U.S. What the self-response rate is really those folks that answer on their own, whether they answer online or over the phone or on paper and soon the Census Bureau will be sending out paper forms during the week of April 8 and moving forward for those who did not answer online or over the phone. I will note though for the same time period the national self-response rate is 45.7%. So we're just two-tenths of a point behind but of course we have California's big and diverse and the most populous state in the country. If you think about it, we have already counted more people, more households than the populations of entire other states.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Wow. I know in my household I have received several pieces of mail from the Census. I imagine every household should be receiving something in the mail and even though it's not addressed directly to them, what should they do with that mail that they're getting?

Ditas Katague:

Right, so in mid-March, they would have received their first letter which gave them their 16 digit PIN. That PIN is geocoded to your address even though it will say resident. If you didn't answer right away during the first two or three weeks of MARCH, you get a reminder and then April 1, you get a postcard and if you still haven't responded, you'll get a paper form. Those folks who are those early achievers, went on early, they won't receive any additional. Those that are a little bit like mine got lost in the mail or they've been busy thinking about other things, they'll get a paper form which is great because then you have all of the options available. We encourage people to go online to my2020census.gov and answer that way. There's also the phone options, although we do know right now there is longer waits with the phone options, and then the paper option will be available just shortly. There is easy ways to do it safely and from the comfort of your home.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Great, thank you. Mightyvale, have you been involved so far in Census 2020? What kind of outreach efforts are you leading?

Marivel Servin:

I've been part of different outreach teams. I work with [inaudible 00:05:02] for Tomorrow and they recently started up their second round of census phonebanking. While they do that, I've been involved with the California Community College Census Ambassadors and with that we've ... My group at least with Bakersfield College has done over 15 class presentations before all these COVID-19 restrictions but now we're moving into doing digital work and doing social media. What I have been in charge of is making sure that everyone online is seeing census material often and so that they could remind their families and friends to also fill out their census.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Great. You mentioned something that caught my ear. The census ambassadors, what are the census ambassadors, how do you become a census ambassador and if a student still sounds like they might be interested in this, is it still possible to join?

Marivel Servin:

I don't know if it's still possible to hire them on, but a census ambassador, what we do is just inform our community about the opportunities that the census brings for us and the different resources that our communities can receive if we get a complete count. Where I live it's actually a hard to count city all around, there isn't any areas that aren't hard to count, so it's really important for our area to get that count as complete as possible so that our parks and our hospitals and our schools can receive the funding that they deserve.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Great. Hopefully everyone takes the opportunity to be a census ambassador and gets the word out to everyone. Now you mentioned something about the hard to count communities and this is a question to both of you and why don't we start with you Mightyvale. So I understand that there are many efforts to get out and reach hard to count community college students, especially those that before this crisis, they were centered on campuses. Now that they're all sheltering in place at home, what changes are being made to the outreach plans? Because in some cases, they may be staying in shelters or homes that are not in the city that they once were or are going to college so what are both of you doing to reach those hard to find students now that they're place-bound?

Marivel Servin:

What we were doing before the COVID situation was doing tabling at our college. We were specifically gearing toward college students since they are one of the hardest to count communities since a lot of college students have mixed living statuses, like some may be living with their family but some may have housemates so what we were doing was educating them on how to properly count themselves, if they lived in dorms or with other roommates that weren't their family, but since the COVID, what we've been seeing is that a lot of college students changed their housing status so if they were living with housemates, now most of them are living back with their families. What we've been doing is expanding our reach to accommodate this change and we're letting our community know since a lot of them may know college students or may have college students in their households so we're expanding to let everyone know about the census and the importance of it.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Great. Given this reality Dedus, what are some of the efforts that your office is making to now reach individuals who may have had to shift their places of residence, who are no longer on college campuses or in dorms? What is the state doing at this point?

Ditas Katague:

Right. Well the California census campaign, as you know, it's just the outreach, that's all we do. We don't do the enumeration, that's the U.S. Census Bureau's job. We are working with more than 120 multicultural partners including local governments, tribal governments, K-12 schools, [inaudible 00:08:48] offices of education, community-based organizations, state agencies, faith-based organizations, I'm listing all these because it's important, labor unions, small businesses, ethnic and mainstream media outlets and others and I say that because it's a comprehensive reach because what we have strategized to do is weave together coverage like a blanket of coverage so if you think about where people are, we're working with the country and the tribal and the jurisdictions, if you think about who they are, we're working with community organizations that work with certain populations that are vulnerable and then we're thinking about all of that saying how do we reach them and can we reach them through

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faith-based organizations, through labor unions, through small businesses. Where they are, who they are and how do they reach them.

Ditas Katague:

In spite, and that was everything that we were doing beforehand, so in spite of COVID and the sheltering in place, our partners have shifted to both high tech and low tech means of reaching people while sheltering in place and while remaining safe. Anywhere from the high tech of targeted digital advertising, phonebanking, peer to peer texting, all the way to low tech direct mail, good old direct mail, leaving handouts and information at convenience stores, pharmacies, grocery stores, leaving grocery bags that are branded with it, with inserts about why it's so important, and our first five partners have been working with emergency food banks and leaving and helping, volunteering there because they've lost a lot of volunteers but while they're volunteering filling the food, putting information about the census and why it's so important and then also we're trying to work with where the school lunch pickup is when you can still drive by and get food for your children, being able to connect the dots for folks that are hard to count to actually understand how all ... Just filling out this form, this form that takes less than ... Almost 10 minutes, impacts a lot of the services that they're receiving right now considering the pandemic.

Ditas Katague:

They're doing amazing work. I was just on a call with them and one of them mentioned good old fashioned lawn signs. We forget about now that we're in place, people still have to ... They're not around and about, but they are in targeted areas. They got to go to Costco, they got to go to the grocery store, they have to go to pharmacy. Putting those in places, post office. People who have post office boxes, even though you won't receive a form in there, you still have to go there to pick up your mail. Putting it, really targeting where people are going. Community college students, they are in every population across California and so they're both important to be reached out to but they can also play a huge role in reaching all our populations.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

As you think about what happens from here forward, what are some of the timelines that our listeners should know about the 2020 census and what do you think are some of the most important realities about filling out the census and how do you ensure that their information is protected?

Ditas Katague:

Right, those are great questions. The Census Bureau as I mentioned earlier will be sending out paper forms to households this week, so those households that haven't responded. Those paper forms are only going to be in English and Spanish, so that's important to note. You can also get assistance in 12 non-English languages when you go to the my2020census.gov, and by phone and so those languages and assistance is there to help them fill out this confidential simple nine-question census questionnaire. To get to is their data safe, I want to make sure that people know that there is no citizenship question. I know there was some talk of it last year and I want to make sure that people did hear that it is not included on the census form this time around and that your data is protected by Title XIII, it's against the law for any census employee, any federal agency, none of them can get ahold of your personal data. Not even the president can ask for your personal data. They can go to jail for -

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Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

That's good to know.

Ditas Katague:

Yes. It really is. People are worried, they're worried about the citizenship question and they're worried about they're going to share my data with other folks. My daughter always tells this story, she's 16 now, when her classmates were like, "I'm not filling that out because that's too much personal data." She always says, "You know what? You guys fill more personal data out on a BuzzFeed quiz when you're trying to figure out what Harry Potter house you're in." Any time you get those things on your feed of, "Here, fill out this survey," to figure out, I don't know, what your middle moonstone name is or something. People fill those things online and they give a lot of personal data but the U.S. Census Bureau, this data that you fill out on these questionnaires, it's not going to be shared or sold to anyone.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Great. That's really important information because there is so much misinformation out there so it's worth repeating that none of this personal information will be collected and used against anyone. Mightyvale, as you talk to students, what do you tell them, why is this so important to them?

Marivel Servin:

Well, when I was doing my census presentations in classes, it was actually easier to tell who was actually interested or nervous about the citizenship question and what I would tell them is that they are super protected, it's super confidential, and I personalized it and let them know that my family will be filling it out because we want future generations to have better opportunities, better schooling, better parks and recreations and I think that makes it worth it to them. Like letting them know that in 10 years, someone could be graduating from high school or college and these funds would make a huge difference in easing that transition.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

Wow. That's really important because it's about what kind of resources they will have going forward as well as their children going forward and what kind of representation we will have in Washington, D.C. which is so critical as we see the news every single day, it's important that California has as much representation as it deserves. Let me begin to wrap up here and I'd like to turn it over to the two of you, either one, feel free to go first. Just what would be your final comments, your final thoughts to our listeners, the students, faculty, staff, listening to this podcast? What would be your final thoughts and encouragement to them?

Marivel Servin:

My final encouragements as for the census is obviously fill out your census, message your friends, your family, make sure that they've filled out and they've been counted. Their little ones, their college students, anyone and just to remember that regardless of immigration status or income, you matter just as much as the next person and this is something where everyone's voices can be heard so we should take advantage of that opportunity.

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Ditas Katague:

Great. I would just say just to remember it's about three things, it's about power, it's about money, and it's about data, and that data is used for a lot of things from figuring out how many seats we need in classrooms to where the next Trader Joe's is going to be or to where a corporation is going to locate to have jobs so it's about job creation, it's about emergency rooms and having them 10 minutes closer so your loved one can get there quicker, it's about roads, it's about schools, it's about healthcare and our services that are out there. I would just say I encourage all Californians and especially our community college community that's out there from students to faculty that make sure that you count everyone in your home including friends or family members who are living or sleeping there most of the time and I know some students may live in their cars, make sure they go online and are counted as well. Remember that the Census Bureau will never ask about your citizenship status or for sensitive information like your social security number, bank accounts or payments or any type of donations.

Ditas Katague:

The Census Bureau will never reach out to you on behalf of a political party, super important to know, and that your census responses are protected by law and cannot be shared with anyone or used by any other government agency. The answers can't be used for law enforcement or to determine eligibility for government benefits or immigration enforcement. Just to summarize, your community is depending on you taking those 10 minutes to respond, to show your voice, and those 10 minutes will impact your community for the next 10 years. I encourage everyone to be counted and to make sure that all of their community is counted as well.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley:

That's a wonderful message. Thank you so much to the two of you for everything that you're doing to ensure that all Californians are counted. So please, go online right now to my2020census.gov, it's about power, money, and data. What a great lawn sign I think that is a powerful message and I encourage everyone, everyone listening to the podcast, if you haven't already, go online, fill out the census my2020census.gov and get it done for you, your family and for the future of California. Thank you to the two of you for joining us today and you've been listening to an episode of the California Community College Chancellor's Office Podcast and we've been talking about Census 2020. Thank you for listening and we'll be back to you again soon.

Speaker 4:

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Speaker 4:

This has been a California Community Colleges presentation.