



EMBARGOED TO MONDAY OCTOBER 13

Children's census results launched

- Do boys react faster than girls?
- Do girls skip quicker than boys?
- Are girls more likely to own a cell phone than boys?
- How many children go to school without having breakfast?
- Do Auckland children spend longer than other NZers travelling to school?
- What is the favourite school subject for boys?
- Do girls sit around more than boys at lunchtime?
- What percentage of NZ children can have an everyday conversation in Maori?
- How many NZ children were born in another country?

The results of a children's census of 18,000 school children, released this week by the CensusAtSchool project team at The University of Auckland, will help build a unique picture of the lives of New Zealand children.

Megan Jowsey, CensusAtSchool New Zealand Coordinator, says the web-based initiative joins partner projects in the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Australia and will allow New Zealand school children to answer questions about themselves and their international counterparts.

The project, supported by Statistics NZ, the Ministry of Education, and the Department of Statistics at The University of Auckland, aims to enhance statistical enquiry in the classroom by providing a rich database for students to investigate.

"By taking part in the survey and then 'playing detective' with the data, just like statisticians do, students will discover interesting patterns and comparisons, that will bring their maths lessons alive.

"This will also raise awareness of the importance to society of data collection, as occurs with the national Census," Ms Jowsey says.

Professor Chris Wild, Head of the Department of Statistics at The University of Auckland, says children in the 21st century need to acquire the skills that will enable them to use information technology and data to learn about their world and make informed decisions.

"And there is no better way for them to start learning these skills than by asking and answering questions about their own lives and those of their peers, both here in New Zealand and around the world."

Children from 400 self-selected schools throughout New Zealand, took part in the recent online survey which included questions on height, foot length, eye colour, country of birth, languages spoken, technology access, breakfast foods, favourite subjects at school, travel to school, physical activities, role models, dominant hand and an electronic reaction timer.

A student randomly chosen from the 18,000 taking part is most likely to be female, to have brown eyes, to be in Year 9 (age 13), to attend a school in the Auckland region, to live in a household of four people, to have her own cell phone, to have access to a computer and the internet, to travel to school by car, and to have art as her favourite subject.

Twenty percent of children surveyed were not born in New Zealand, with their countries of origin ranging across a huge list topped by Australia, Korea, England, South Africa, China and

India. Almost one-third of students said they could hold an everyday conversation in more than one language.

Family members are the most popular role models chosen overall. When asked to think of someone they look up to, 42% of students chose 'family member'. This response was highest for the younger children, and by Year 10 (14 year olds) 'actor/celebrity/singer' was the choice of 21% and 'sportsperson' was chosen by another 21%.

Art is the favourite subject overall for those surveyed, with physical education/health a close second. Physical education is the favourite subject for one-third of boys at Year 9 and 10, while girls of the same age favour art and physical education equally. Mathematics is the second favourite subject for boys in the primary school Years 5 and 6, while girls at this age prefer art then dance/drama.

One question asked what the child had had for breakfast that morning, with, 10% of those surveyed replied 'nothing'. The traditional toast and/or cereal breakfast foods remain the most common choices, with some interesting additions reflecting ethnic diversity.

The question on technology ownership showed that more than half of those surveyed owned a cell phone. At Years 9 and 10, the first two years at secondary school, 90% of students had access to a computer at home and 84% had internet use.

Rachel Cunliffe, who developed both the website and online survey, says that many overseas countries are now looking at on-line voting and census collection processes.

"With almost 350,000 hits on our website to date, and encouraging feedback, it augers well for future use of such technology."

The project was made possible by the award of a New Zealand Science, Mathematics and Technology Teacher fellowship from the Royal Society of New Zealand to coordinator Ms Jowsey. She is the Head of Department of Maths at Birkenhead College, but has spent a year at the University.

"I have had a really stimulating year organising this project, working alongside the statistics experts here at the university. The feedback has been positive from throughout the country, and the uptake by teachers and students has been fantastic.

"We hope to run the project again in two years time to produce some longitudinal data. Meanwhile the data is now available to schools to download and investigate."

See www.censusatschool.org.nz

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