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Open letter to BC School District Superintendents and Trustees,

As you know, population projections are used when considering opening or closing public and private facilities (including public schools health care services), and Official Community Plans, as well as electrical generation, transportation needs etc.; however, the methods used to create population projections are not always open to verification or are very specialized with results being difficult or not possible to reproduce.

For example, there is “no commitment” for BC Stats and the Ministry responsible for the creation and dissemination of population numbers to provide changes to methods, and parents can be excluded from meetings about the methods used to create population forecasts referred to when considering recommendations to close schools.

In turn, the lack of access to the methods, and the inputs, makes it difficult, if not impossible for citizens to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the forecasting methods, as well as leaving concerns about the reliability of the numbers unanswered.

In an effort to address the need for population projections created with open methods and inputs, I have developed an easy to use and understandable method to create verifiable, reproducible population projections, based on open, readily available population numbers, namely Statistics Canada’s census counts. This method utilizes cohort change ratios, used to create the Population Signatures described in previous letters. You may recall, Population Signatures were used to show net migration of families.¹

As it turns out, not surprisingly, this technique is one of the oldest still used to create population projections (because it makes sense). Variations of this method, are used by Demographers/Population Analysts as well as the UN because ...

“the resulting projections not only have internal validity but, also, ‘‘face validity’’” (Smith et al. 2001, pp. 282-285).

... and such a method, using cohort change ratios is ...

“very useful in this regard because it is transparent and easy to explain to a wide range of audiences.” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 60)

I propose that School Districts implement a program to address the need for better understanding of the methods and models used to create population projections.

Such a program would meet the Prescribed Learning Outcomes expectations for improving students ability in interpreting statistical data, and to demonstrate effective research skills, including accessing and assessing information, collecting and evaluating data, required for many courses including Civic Studies 11, Social Studies 11, Sustainable Resources 11 and 12 Essentials of Mathematics 10 to 12.

A “Population Projections Program”, will also provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate skills and attitudes of active citizenship, such as ethical behaviour, open-mindedness, respect for diversity, and collaboration.

¹ See www.wminformatics.com/WManalytics\Articles\120108\PopSigSD.html

Workshops, seminars, and modules addressing statistical methods and population studies could be made available to students and / or educators.

The current Chair of the Royal Society Population Geography Research Group, Adam Dennett confirms

"The method you've developed sounds like the cohort-component method I'm familiar with, which is used quite widely in population projections. It sounds like an excellent idea you have to implement a training programme to increase skills in this area - more people with a working knowledge of how population projections are constructed and the issues inherent with them will never be a bad thing, and I agree that such a course could be a valuable part of a number of social science and quantitative methods courses both at high school and university levels."

Many Demographers / Population Analysts including members of the Canadian Population Society have also expressed support for this initiative, as well as Holly A. Tuokko, PhD, Director, Centre on Aging (University of Victoria) who offers ...

"Your project sounds very interesting and certainly the Centre could be involved in helping you to share this information widely. Thanks for informing me about this project." (December 2012)

Instructors and students could be shown how to create population projection scenarios and see the results.. Students who graduate with this knowledge will be better prepared to address many community issues. May I suggest that an awareness of how population estimates and projections are created is fundamental to active citizenship

Please consider participating in the Population Projection Project. For more information, see ...

www.wminformatics.com/WManalytics/PopAnalysis/PPP_11_Overview.html

Yours truly,



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Member of the Population Groups for the Canadian Association of Geographers and the American Association of Geographers, and the Canadian Population Society, and the Royal Society Population Group list server.

cc. Board of Education, Qualicum School District