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Another Voice: America needs to raise its statistical literacy

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In a world where statistics move markets and decide elections, knowing how to use and interpret data is the key to making informed decisions. Leaders in business, science and government continue to stress that information is the linchpin of success in the 21st century and we need to make sure students have the skills they need to better understand the world around them. The key to this understanding? Statistical literacy.

This belief in the power of applied data led our team, along with other teachers and subject matter experts from across the country, to revise the agency's Statistics in Schools program for the 2016 school year. The updated program provides K-12 teachers with free, classroom-ready activities that use Census Bureau data in the context of history, social studies, geography, sociology and, of course, math.

Fact: In most schools, more emphasis is placed on other advanced math subjects than on statistics. To address this trend, we designed activities for teachers to help bring statistics to life in the classroom.

Fact: Statistics education enhances critical thinking and can be applied across disciplines. Valuable statistics skills empower students of any age and classroom to analyze data about topics in their world, such as involvement in sports, attendance in schools and success of local businesses. To develop a generation of statistically literate students, K-12 teachers in all subjects – not just math – should bring real-world data and statistical elements into lessons.

As the nation's leading source of data about our people and economy, the Census Bureau knows firsthand the importance of understanding these data when leaders use them to inform decisions affecting us all. But even on the micro level, statistical literacy will help students tackle big and small decisions for the rest of their lives. Data are everywhere.

Activities from the Statistics in Schools program use the wealth of information that the Census Bureau collects to help students connect with their communities at home and nationwide. For example, one social studies activity asks students to use the skills of an entrepreneur and data on neighborhood and business incomes to find the best ZIP code for their dream business.

Using real-world, relevant data supports the statistical literacy our students need to achieve success in today's data-driven environment. Thoughtfully integrated programs, like Statistics in Schools, raise students' awareness

of how people use statistics to make decisions that affect our lives. And they open the door to rich insights that can be gained by those who understand them.

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