

You're Crucial to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Participating in the YRBS is easy and important: It helps schools and communities improve the health and wellbeing of our youth

Why is it valuable to collect health-related data about our youth?

- The YRBS collects data from students in grades 7–12 on key health behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death and illness during both youth and adulthood.
- Results help monitor changes over time, identify emerging issues, and plan and evaluate programs to support the health of youth. YRBS data are used by health departments, educators, lawmakers, doctors, and community organizations to inform school and community programs, communications campaigns, and other efforts.
- These efforts ultimately help improve youth health both in the short term (reducing screen time, receiving mental health support) and in the future (reducing the risk of cancer, addiction, or sexually transmitted diseases). Healthy students are better learners and more likely to become healthy adults.

Why should districts and schools participate?

- About 50 high school districts, schools, and students are randomly selected in Montana and cannot be replaced; each school's participation is critical to ensure results are representative of youth nationwide.
- The most accurate representation of health behaviors of all Montana youth happens if public, non-public accredited schools, alternative schools, and the students are all represented.
- The YRBS gives your students an opportunity to share their voice, anonymously and voluntarily.
- Participation brings students' experiences to light so that parents, schools, and communities can provide the most appropriate resources for any challenges students may face.

Montana YRBS Summation

- Over 22,000 students in 294 middle and high schools participated in the 2023 YRBS. In all, over 278,000 Montana students have completed the 16 biennial YRBS surveys since 1991.
- The YRBS is voluntary and anonymous (no student can be identified) and the survey DOES NOT violate any federal or state laws protecting the privacy rights of students.
- The YRBS is confidential (participating schools are not identified in any published reports).
- The YRBS takes only 45 minutes to administer.
- There is NO COST to the school (OPI has transitioned to an online survey format, which has not cost to schools. Any charges incurred in this process is covered).
- The entire enrollment of schools are now able to take the voluntary school survey with the online format.
- Each school will be scheduled for a survey day to take the YRBS that works with their schedule so all involved will have the least stressful survey experience.

“[YRBS] results are critical to understand the health status and needs of our youth ... [and] add great insight into the world of our youth and the environment in which our young people spend the majority of their time.”

Nathan R. Monell, CAE, Executive Director, National PTA

The YRBS helps us understand many health-related topics affecting high school students, including mental health. YRBS data tells us that during the past year Montana students...



Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Legal Factsheet

As in past years, administrators continue asking whether schools participating in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) violate federal laws protecting students' rights and privacy. The answer is NO.

The federal agency and legal staff have researched the issue at both the federal and state levels. The federal laws in question -- The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment of 1994 (PPRA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) -- apply to programs that receive funds from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE). Each of these federal laws is specific in protecting students' rights and privacy when information is part of a student's education record or when a student is required to participate in a project where personal information is revealed. PPRA protects the privacy of a student's education record. YRBS responses are anonymous and impossible to associate with individual students. No correlation is possible between anonymous YRBS data and personal student records; thus, participation in the YRBS does not violate the provisions of PPRA.

FERPA addresses written parental consent when minor students are required to participate in USDE-funded research projects. The YRBS is a voluntary survey and, therefore, does not violate the provisions of FERPA. The Office of Public Instruction does, however, recommend that schools make parents aware that the survey is planned for their school, and those parents who do not want their child to participate should notify the school.

Furthermore, there is a provision in FERPA that seeks to ensure instructional materials used in USDE-funded research be made available for inspection by parents. Surveys are not considered instructional materials; rather, they are instruments to evaluate instructional programs. Nevertheless, a copy of the proposed survey is provided to the school months before the survey administration date. The survey instrument should be kept in the main office with the opportunity for viewing by any parent wishing to do so.

In conclusion, schools participating in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) are not in violation of federal laws protecting students' rights and privacy because the YRBS is anonymous (thus impossible to be part of students' records) and voluntary (ensuring that students are not required to participate).

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