



**STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Mick Zais
Superintendent

1429 Senate Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

October 24, 2014

Dear Superintendents:

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will administer the statewide Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS) during the spring of 2015. These surveys are important for tracking behaviors that affect the health and well-being of our youth.

We encourage you to support this extremely important effort. The data collected from the administration of these surveys will be used by our agencies and other organizations to identify the needs of our students and to plan and implement appropriate school health programs to reduce risk behaviors.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this important project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mick Zais".

Mick Zais, PhD
State Superintendent of Education

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine Templeton".

Catherine Templeton
Director, Department of Health and Environmental Control

MZJCT/sbm

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS)

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), in partnership with the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) administers biennial school-based surveys to measure the prevalence of priority health risk behaviors among students in grades six through twelve.

To reduce the number of surveys given to students, South Carolina jointly administers the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS). The surveys include core questions from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as well as questions from DHEC, and the SCDE's Office of Student Intervention Services. This document provides answers to important questions regarding these surveys.

Q. Why are the surveys conducted?

A. The SCDE and DHEC are responsible for identifying and monitoring factors that may affect the health of our youth. South Carolina uses the results from the surveys to (1) monitor priority health risk behaviors among middle and high school students over time; (2) evaluate the impact of broad national, state, and local efforts to prevent risk behaviors; and (3) improve school health education policies and programs.

Q. What topics are included on the surveys?

A. The YRBS focuses on priority health risk behaviors established during youth that result in significantly higher risks for illness and death during both youth and adulthood. These include: behaviors that result in unintentional injuries and violence; tobacco use; alcohol and drug use; sexual behaviors that contribute to HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and unintended pregnancies; unhealthy dietary behaviors; and physical inactivity. In addition, the YRBS also assesses the prevalence of obesity and asthma.

The YTS focuses on the prevalence of tobacco use; exposure to secondhand smoke; minors' access to tobacco; knowledge and attitudes about tobacco use; media and advertising; school curriculum; and tobacco use cessation.

Q. Are sensitive questions asked?

A. Some questions may be considered sensitive by some schools or school districts. AIDS, HIV infection, and other STDs are major health problems. Sexual intercourse and intravenous drug use are among the behaviors known to increase the risk of HIV or other STDs. The only way to determine if adolescents are at risk of becoming infected with HIV or other STDs is to ask questions about these behaviors. Attempted suicide, tobacco use, alcohol and drug use, and weapon-carrying also may be considered sensitive topics. Questions are presented in a straightforward yet sensitive manner.

Q. Is student participation anonymous? How is student privacy protected?

A. Survey administration procedures are designed to protect student privacy by allowing for anonymous and voluntary participation. Students complete the self-administered questionnaire by recording their responses directly on a computer-scanned answer sheet that contains no personal identifiers. Students also are encouraged to use an extra sheet of paper to cover their responses as they complete the questionnaire. Students not participating in the survey are provided with an alternative activity by their school. Published reports do not include names of schools or students.

Q. Who will be surveyed?

A. Fifty middle and fifty high schools are randomly selected from across the state to administer the survey. From each school, four to six classes are randomly selected to participate. Students in half of the selected classes will be asked to complete the YRBS; students in the remaining classes will be asked to complete the YTS.

Q. Are students tracked over time to see how their behavior changes?

A. No. Each year a new sample of schools and students is drawn. Students who participate cannot be tracked because no identifying information is collected.

Q. When will the surveys be conducted?

A. The YRBS and YTS surveys are typically conducted in the spring of odd-numbered years. The state survey coordinators will work with schools to schedule the surveys at a time that works best for the schools—preferably between January 15 and March 15, 2015, prior to the administration of state assessments.

Q. How are the surveys coordinated at each school?

A. Each school is asked to designate a contact person to work with the state survey coordinators. This can be the principal, another administrator, a teacher, or someone else designated by the principal. The school contact person provides a list of class sections, sends out parental notices for the sampled classes, helps promote the survey, and ensures a high participation rate. The SCDE will provide all materials required (e.g., questionnaires, answer sheets, and pencils). Surveys are usually administered by someone from the school. If no one from the school is available, please contact the state coordinator.

Q. How long does it take to complete the surveys? Is there some sort of physical test?

A. One class period is needed for the self-administered questionnaire. It takes approximately ten minutes for the survey administrator to distribute survey materials and read directions to the students. It then takes about thirty minutes for students to record their responses. No physical test or exam is involved.

Q. Do students answer questions truthfully?

A. Research indicates data of this nature may be gathered as reliably from adolescents as from adults. Internal reliability checks help to identify the small percentage of students who falsify their answers. To obtain truthful answers, students must perceive the survey as important and know that procedures have been followed to protect their privacy and allow for anonymous participation.

Q. What about parental consent?

A. This survey is not funded by the United States Department of Education, so active parental consent is not required. However, parents must be directly notified about the survey by mail or e-mail and allowed to indicate if they do not want their child to participate. Forms will be supplied to the school for this purpose. The SCDE will reimburse the schools for the cost of mailing the notifications.

Q. What if school districts, schools, or students do not choose to participate?

A. Participation in the surveys is voluntary. However, to develop accurate estimates of health risk behaviors among adolescents, participation rates must be high. Selected schools and students cannot be replaced. The goal is to achieve a 90 to 95 percent participation rate by selected schools and students.

Q. Can I see the questions the students will be asked?

A. Yes, copies of the surveys are on the YRBS section of the SCDE website:
<http://ed.sc.gov/agency/programs-services/205/>

Q. Where can I find additional information about the surveys?

A. To obtain additional information, please contact one of the following state survey coordinators:

YRBS Coordinator

Benjamin Goodwin
South Carolina Department of Education
bgoodwin@ed.sc.gov
803-734-8125

YTS Coordinator

Dan Kilpatrick
Department of Health and Environmental Control
kilpatdj@dhec.sc.gov
803-545-4484