

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE 2014 HEALTHY YOUTH SURVEY

1. Why is the survey conducted?

The survey is used to identify and monitor factors that affect the health of youth in our schools. There is mounting evidence supporting the concept that reducing students' health-risk behaviors can have a positive impact on their academic performance. These surveys measure a number of health related issues such as substance use, poor nutrition, depression, violence, and safety. Any of these can distract students from school. Survey results may help identify areas where students need extra support so that they can be successful in school. Additionally, survey results can indicate changes in health behaviors over time and schools can use the results to identify important areas of need.

2. How is the survey funded?

The Healthy Youth Survey is sponsored by The Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Washington State Department of Health, the Department of Social and Health Services' Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery, and the Washington State Liquor Control Board. The survey is given without using any Seattle Public Schools monies.

3. Is participation voluntary? Are answers anonymous?

Student participation is completely voluntary and anonymous. Parents are notified about the survey and given the option to withdraw their student from participation. Students are also given the choice to opt-out of survey participation. Students complete the self-administered questionnaire by recording their responses directly onto an answer sheet containing no names or identification numbers. To the extent possible, students' desks are spread throughout the classroom to minimize the chance that students will see each other's responses. Students are also given a paper to cover their responses as they complete the questionnaire. Published reports do not include names of classrooms or students.

4. Do students tell the truth on this type of survey?

Both national research and experience in Washington indicate that the data collected are accurate when students are informed of the importance of the survey and their responses are completely anonymous. Internal reliability checks help to identify the small percentage of students who falsify their answers, and these surveys are not included in the results.

5. How is the data used?

The Healthy Youth Survey provides important information about our students which can be used to guide school policy and programs. Schools and departments can use these results to:

- Learn the prevalence of health-related behaviors among students
- Evaluate or improve existing school programs, projects and school health education programs
- Support modifying or creating new policies that promote health
- Track progress toward meeting school health and health promotion program goals
- Provide information needed to seek funding and other support for new initiatives
- Understand the school climate
- Contribute to the School Improvement Planning process

Seattle Public Schools also shares this data with local government and community agencies. These groups use the data for much the same reasons – developing, assessing, and improving programs to improve the health of our city’s youth.

6. Why are sexual behavior questions asked?

Sexual behavior questions were asked in grades eight and above. At least 44 states ask sexual behavior questions on their youth surveys. Sexual behavior questions can provide useful information for how and where to target appropriate interventions for preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases with limited resources. The data will be used to evaluate and improve existing sexual health education to most effectively meet the needs of our students.

Having actual data about the prevalence (or lack thereof) of sexual behavior can assist a district or school in reshaping social norms. For example, asking questions about sexual behavior gives students who have NOT had sex the opportunity to be represented. According to Seattle Public Schools’ 2012 Healthy Youth Survey, 75% of tenth grade students have never had sexual intercourse. Unfortunately, students often operate on the inaccurate perception that most other youth have had sexual intercourse.