

2020 Montana Prevention Needs Assessment

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the focus of the 2020 student survey?

The focus, of the student survey, is on risky behaviors associated with the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, such as school dropout, delinquency, and violence - that can result in injury and/or impede positive development among our youth. The survey also includes risk and protective factors, which are attitudes and opinions research has shown to be highly correlated with these risky behaviors.

Who will be participating in the study?

In addition to Montana, 38 other states have or are conducting this survey. In each state, communities will be identified and a sample of students in the eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades in those communities will be surveyed. For schools agreeing to participate in the Montana survey, **ALL students in grades 8, 10, and 12** will be asked to complete the survey. Schools will also have the option to have all students in 7, 9, and 11 participate if they so choose.

Why should my school participate?

This research effort is part of an important ongoing study being funded by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Service's Addictive and Mental Disorders Division's Chemical Dependency Bureau through funds it receives from the Federal Center for Substance Abuse Treatment/Prevention. It aims to gather information related to the development of health and behavior problems such as reductions in substance abuse, school dropout, violence, and delinquency. This information will enable the Department and communities to estimate the need for specific types of prevention services within the state and to assist communities and schools in developing strategic prevention planning based on local needs.

By participating in this survey, your school and community will have a valuable opportunity to learn more about the needs of its students. Your school will be mailed a summary report and the frequency (cross-tab) data for your school the week of September 11, 2020, along with statewide, district, county and school classification totals for comparison. **This information, which is provided at no cost**, can be very useful in guiding the planning of prevention programs for your students such as Drug Free Communities grants, 21st Century grants and applying for other education and prevention grants.

Does my school have to participate?

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. Each school has a right to decline participation, just as each student in a school has a right to decline participating in the survey if he or she so desires. However, to obtain accurate estimates of these behaviors statewide, and at regional and multi-county districts, broad participation in the survey is needed.

Are sensitive questions asked?

The survey questions have been designed to measure key behaviors without asking sensitive questions, although it is possible some students, parents, schools or school districts may consider some questions sensitive. The survey has been completed by over two million students in 38 states. The survey includes questions related to alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, school dropout, delinquency, violent behaviors, and related risk and protective factors. Unless questions in these topic areas are asked honestly and straightforwardly, we cannot know the degree to which Montana's youth engage in these risky behaviors. **It is important to remember, the survey is anonymous, so no single student response will be able to be connected with that particular student.**

Can I see the survey?

A copy of the questionnaire to be used in February-April 2020 is available for review and will be included in the packets mailed to school officials. School principals will be asked to keep the survey questionnaire on file. In the letter to parents announcing the survey, we ask parents be informed of their right to view the survey questionnaire by contacting your office. We ask the questionnaire not be copied to ensure integrity of the study.

What if a student does not wish to participate?

A student's participation in this survey is completely voluntary. We ask that at a minimum of two weeks before the survey is conducted, a letter be sent to each student's parents informing them of the survey. In the letter for "opt out" schools, parents will be told their student's participation is voluntary and given the option of contacting the school if they wish to decline participation. For "opt in" schools, parents will be given the option of selecting to have their child participate in the survey. Additionally, at the beginning of the class period in which the survey will be administered (we suggest you use classroom period two), we will ask the teacher read a prepared statement informing students their participation is voluntary. They will be given the option to decline to participate, or to skip any question they prefer not to answer. We ask any students who decline the survey be provided with an alternative activity to do while the survey is being administered. **If you would like an electronic copy of these two letters, please email Mary Johnstun at mary@bach-harrison.com.**

Is student participation anonymous?

Yes, completely. The student will be given a survey booklet containing question items and a place for him or her to record his or her response. The survey booklet will not have the student's name, or any other identifying information on it. Before they begin, students will be reminded they should not write their name or other identifying information on the booklet. When completing the survey, we ask students be arranged in the classroom so their responses cannot be seen by the teacher administering the survey or by any of the student's peers. At the end of the class period, survey booklets will immediately be gathered and placed in a sealed envelope or box.

Completed surveys will be mailed by overnight carrier or registered mail at the **expense of the Department.**

What will the student be asked to do?

Students will be asked to complete a self-administered survey questionnaire **during one class period** at school. The student will be given a survey booklet containing survey questions. Students will be asked to read each question and select the answer in the survey booklet that most closely matches the way he or she feels. All questions are self-report, and no physical tests or exams are involved.

How long does it take to complete the survey?

The survey will take approximately 45 minutes to complete and will be administered during a single class period. Although it is expected students will have sufficient time to complete the entire survey, they will be informed they should answer as many questions as possible during class, but not be concerned if they are not able to finish all of them. Students who finish before the end of class will be asked to work quietly at their desks while their classmates finish.

When will the study be conducted?

We are asking the survey be administered February 1-April 30, 2020. The survey will be administered to all participating schools during this same period. Within a given school, the survey will be administered to all participating grades during the same class period. This will help avoid students discussing questions with classmates who have not yet completed the survey and biasing results. We realize conflicts between the survey and previous commitments by the school may arise. ***If the preferred dates cannot be accommodated by the school, we ask that you contact Mary Johnstun, Project Director at (801) 842-2682 or e-mail: mary@bach-harrison.com to make arrangements for alternative survey dates that will meet your school's needs.***

What will the school be asked to do?

The school superintendent or school principal is asked to complete the "School Agreement Form" (salmon colored form) provided with the letter of invitation to participate from the Department's Director and to return the agreement by **November 22, 2019**. A self-addressed prepaid postage envelope is provided for this purpose. You may make the agreement through our on-line commitment registration. The survey will be administered in a school classroom setting by the classroom teacher. We ask schools to work with Mary Johnstun to select a date for administration. Bach-Harrison LLC will provide the school with all necessary materials for completing the survey, including teacher instructions for administering the survey and a written script that will be read to students at the beginning of class explaining the purpose and voluntary nature of the survey. Also, we are providing your school with a suggested parent letter that should be sent home with students in the eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades at least a minimum of two weeks prior to the date of administration of the survey in your school. **Additionally, we will provide prepaid mailing for return of all of the questionnaires (completed and unused).**

How is the survey coordinated at each school?

The school is asked to appoint a coordinator for the survey in each school building (or for the school district). This person might be the Drug-Free Schools and Community Coordinator, a regional prevention specialist, or some other district level individual. This person will work with your school personnel and Mary Johnstun to identify a date for administering the survey, deliver all necessary survey materials to school classrooms, provide participating teachers with a brief training (if necessary) on administering the survey, and answer and needed questions. This coordinator, if possible, should be identified on the "School Agreement Form" (*salmon colored form*) and/or during the on-line commitment registration.

Will the results be made available?

Results will be mailed to your school the week of September 11, 2020. A summary and frequency (cross-tab) data of school, state, district, and school classification level responses will be provided to your school in appreciation of your assistance in this survey. A copy of the database for your school will also be made available electronically. The Montana Prevention Needs Assessment will also make technical assistance available to assist schools with use of the reports.

How will this information be used?

Information from the 2020 student survey can be used to meet a variety of needs at the community and state levels.

The survey provides information is used to identify the importance of various problem behaviors as well as protective factors. This information can be used as input for resource and policy decisions, such as targeting interventions or prevention services. The data has been used by schools to establish school and district-level prevention plans and complete applications for discretionary Safe and Drug Free School funds. The data has also been used to compete for federal funds under the Safe Schools/Health Student Initiative Grant funded by the Federal Departments of Education, Health and Human Services and office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention. In previous years, twenty-four communities in collaboration with their schools used the data to successfully compete for Strategic Prevention Framework Grants and have received funding based upon their communities participation in the Prevention Needs Assessment. Current prevention-focused government funding continues to require PNA data. Schools receiving information may choose to share it with other community organizations. Data will be helpful when communities submit funding proposals for state and federal funds for prevention services. School data can be compared to state norms as well as multi-county district and planning region norms. State-level data can be used to compare Montana results with the other states that are conducting this survey project.

At the state and federal levels, there are competing interests for limited resources. Results of this survey can be and have been used to provide evidence for the high priority of those issues and assist communities to compete nationally for federal funding. Communities throughout

Montana regularly use the Prevention Needs Assessment data to compete successfully for Federal funding from various Federal agencies. The data has also assisted the State of Montana to successfully obtain special federal funds for prevention services. In most Federal grants, 85% of funds must be used at the community level for prevention.

How reliable is the use of student self-report data?

The questionnaire being used by Montana is based upon the model questionnaire developed by a six-state consortium of Utah, Kansas, Washington, Oregon, South Carolina and Maine and the previous seven surveys conducted by the Department. The survey was developed using parent and youth focus groups. The confidence level is expected to be 95% at the statewide level +/- 2%, and at 95% +/- 4% at the multi-county district levels. The questionnaire design includes internal validity checks for exaggeration and false reporting. The data is durable as it holds up over a period of time. Finally, the questionnaire has construct validity as it measures what it says it measures. These various integrity measures have been applied over a four-year period.

Can the student questionnaire be changed?

The basic instrument being used is the same questionnaire used throughout the life of the MPNA project. The questionnaire has been modified to remove questions (based upon analysis) that did not provide the information sought and to expand information on use of tobacco and other drugs. Comments on questionnaire can be provided to Christine Steele until November 30, 2017. To maintain the integrity of the instrument and its data comparability from one administration of the survey to the next, questions are not likely to be modified. This continuity in questions is necessary to preserve the reliability of information used to determine protective and risk factors for each of the four focus areas (domains) of the survey: individual/peer, family, school, community. Can a question be removed from the instrument? Not really, for the same reason already given. However, during the finalization of the questionnaire, all comments will be given careful consideration including those to remove a question. Additionally, a student can choose not to answer a question he or she is uncomfortable answering.

