



Betty A. Rosa, Ed.D.
Commissioner, NYSED



Office of Addiction Services and Supports

Arlene González-Sánchez, M.S., L.M.S.W.
Commissioner, OASAS

June 11, 2021

Dear Superintendent or School Administrator:

As we are all aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted every aspect of life and has been particularly challenging and disruptive for students. These disruptions have increased stress, anxiety, and trauma, which are risk factors that can lead to harmful behaviors.

The New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) monitor student risk factors that impact health, safety, and academic success through voluntary student surveys. This information allows both agencies to identify student health and prevention needs and develop resources to help reduce and prevent future and current behavioral health issues.

Data collection is particularly important this year, given that New York State (NYS) legalized adult use of nonmedical cannabis in March 2021, and retail stores are expected to open in the coming 18-24 months. These data will provide an important baseline on cannabis use and related behaviors among students and can inform prevention and public education efforts. Collecting this information through the Youth Development Survey (YDS) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) will help avoid additional data collection through other mechanisms

Due to delays caused by the pandemic, both surveys will be administered this fall, and the timing of survey administration may overlap. We understand that student instructional time is extremely valuable and wanted schools to know that both agencies will work together to keep student survey time to a minimum.

To help you understand the differences between the two surveys, we have provided short summaries below:

- OASAS offers NYS middle and high schools the opportunity to participate in the YDS. The YDS measures 7th-12th grade students' strengths and risks for developing health problems like underage drinking, substance use, and problem gambling. The survey will provide county-wide data for OASAS and districtwide or school-building-level data for the participating districts. The district will have the option of having students complete the survey online or using a hardcopy version. All middle and high schools (except those chosen by CDC to participate in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey) will be contacted via email by OASAS to participate in the YDS in June.

- NYSED contracts with its technical assistance center, the NYS Center for School Health (NYSCSH), to administer the YRBS to 30 high schools randomly selected by the CDC. The schools selected will be notified by NYSCSH via mail and email in August. The YRBS measures 9th-12th grade students' strengths and risks related to unintentional injuries and violence, alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, dietary behaviors, physical activity, sexual behaviors, obesity and weight control, and other health topics. Only one to four classes in the selected high schools take the survey, which provides both NYS and National YRBS trend data.

Facts for consideration include:

- All surveys are anonymous, and no identifying information is recorded.
- School district participation is **voluntary and free of charge**.
- Parents will be provided the opportunity to excuse their child(ren) from survey participation. Students who agree to participate will not be required to answer all questions, only those that they want to answer. Students do not have to give a reason for not participating.
- Each survey takes approximately one class period to complete.
- Students who decline will be assigned an alternative activity (e.g., reading a book).

We strongly encourage your district to take advantage of the opportunity to participate in one of these surveys to assess the risk behaviors of NYS youth in order to implement State, community, and school-wide policies to improve the health of students and reduce the likelihood that they will engage in risky behavior.

Should you have questions regarding the YDS, please contact NYS OASAS at OASASYDS@oasas.ny.gov.

Should you have questions regarding the YRBS, please contact NYSCSH at nyscsh@monroe2boces.org.

Sincerely,



Patricia Zuber-Wilson
Associate Commissioner
Div. of Prevention and Problem Gambling Services
NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports



Kathleen R. DeCataldo
Assistant Commissioner
Office of Student Support Services
NYS Education Department