



# 2024 Montana School Survey Fact Sheet

*In the winter of 2024, the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Service's Addictive and Mental Disorders Division's Prevention Bureau through funds it receives from the Federal Center for Substance Abuse Treatment/Prevention and International Survey Associates/dba Pride Surveys, will conduct the Montana Prevention Needs Assessment (MPNA) survey. The purpose of this survey will be to gather information needed to plan important prevention and intervention programs to combat such problems as alcohol, other drug use, and violence among adolescents in the state. The survey will be conducted with 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students, with the option for students in grades 7,9, and 11 to participate if they choose. This fact sheet answers important questions about the student survey.*

## 1. What is the focus of the School Survey?

The focus of this student survey is health risk behaviors such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use and school dropout, delinquency, and violence that can result in injury and/or impede positive development among Montana youth. The survey also includes questions about risk and protective factors, which include attitudes and opinions that research has shown to predict involvement in these negative health risk behaviors.

## 2. Who will be participating in the study?

All public schools will be offered this opportunity and all students in the 8th, 10th, and 12th grade levels will be surveyed at each participating school. Schools will also have the option to have all students in 7, 9, and 11 participate if they so choose.

## 3. Why should my school participate?

By participating in this survey, your school has a valuable opportunity to learn more about the needs of its students. Each participating school will receive an individualized school report containing school level and statewide data. Your school will be mailed a summary report and the frequency (cross-tab) data for your school beginning the week of September 19, 2024. The results of this survey (**provided at no cost**) will assist your administrators, faculty and staff to:

- develop strategic prevention planning based on the needs of students in the district;
- gather information which will help to target behavior problems related to substance abuse, violence, delinquency, and truancy;
- estimate the need for specific types of prevention services due to the availability of drugs and firearms within the community;
- gather information regarding factors which may indirectly affect intellectual development and career planning goals of the student; and
- prepare school improvement plans relative to school environment, external factors that present barriers to learning, community involvement, learning process, and school risk factors
- be useful in applying for Drug Free Communities grants, 21st Century grants, and other education and prevention grants.

**\*To assure anonymity in districts with small enrollments, a minimum of 10 completed questionnaires per grade level is required for grade level reporting. All districts, regardless of size, must return to the contractor all completed questionnaires from all schools in the district by May 10, 2024, in order to receive local data reports.**

#### 4. 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, broad participation in the survey is needed so an accurate representation of students' needs and behaviors across the state, including regional and multi-county levels, can be evaluated.

#### 5. Are sensitive questions asked?

The survey questions have been designed to measure key behaviors without asking sensitive questions, although it is possible that some questions may be considered sensitive by some students, parents, schools or school districts. The survey includes questions related to alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; violent behaviors, and related risk and protective factors. Unless questions in these topic areas are asked honestly and in a straightforward manner, we cannot know the degree to which Montana's youth engage in these health risk behaviors. **It is important to remember that the survey is anonymous, so no student's responses will ever be able to be connected with a student.**

#### 6. Can I view the survey?

A copy of the questionnaire to be used in February-April 2024 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 survey.

#### 7. What if a student does not wish to participate?

Each student's participation in this survey is completely voluntary. At the beginning of the class period when the survey will be administered, the teacher will read a prepared statement that informs the students that their participation is voluntary. They will be given the option to decline to participate, or to skip any question that they prefer not to answer. Students who decline to participate in the survey will be provided with an alternative activity to do while the survey is being administered.

We ask that at a minimum of two weeks before the survey is conducted, a letter (you will be sent an electronic template that may be modified) 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.

#### 8. Is student participation anonymous?

Yes, completely. For students completing the survey online, they will receive a secure survey link and access code. The online survey does not capture an IP address or any other identifying information about the student. For students completing the paper survey, they will be given a survey booklet that contains the 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 that they should not write their name or other identifying information on the booklet. When completing the survey, students will be arranged in the classroom so that their responses cannot be seen by the teacher administering the survey or by any of the students' peers. At the end of the class period, survey booklets will immediately be gathered and placed in a sealed envelope or box.

#### 9. What will the students be asked to do?

The 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 or take the survey online. The student will be asked to read each question and select the answer in the survey booklet or online that most closely matches the way he/she feels. All questions are self-reported, and no physical tests or exams are involved.

#### 10. How long does it take to complete the survey?

The survey will take approximately 45-55 minutes to complete and will be administered during a single class period. Although it is expected that the students will have sufficient time to complete the entire survey, they will be informed that they should answer as many questions as possible during the 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.

#### 11. When will the survey be conducted?

The survey will be administered to all participating schools during January 29 – May 3, 2024. Within a given school, the survey will be administered to all participating grades during the same class period. This will help avoid students' discussing the questions with classmates who have not yet completed the survey and biasing the results.

#### 12. What will the school be asked to do?

**The school superintendent or school principal is asked to complete the "School Agreement Form" via the online portal (<https://mpna.pridesurveys.com>) instructions provided, or via paper form provided with the letter of invitation to participate from the Department's Director and to return the agreement by **December 8, 2023**. A self-addressed prepaid postage envelope is provided for this purpose.**

The survey will be administered in the classroom by the class teacher. The school can work with our contractor, ISA/dba Pride Surveys, to coordinate the survey administration. The state contractor will provide the schools with all necessary materials for completing the survey, including teacher instructions for administering the survey and a written script that will be read to the students at the beginning of the class that explains the purpose and voluntary nature of the survey.

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 completed questionnaires. Unused questionnaires can be destroyed at your location.**

#### 13. 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 Melissa Stephens 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 any needed questions. This coordinator, if possible, should be identified on the "School Agreement Form" and/or during the on-line commitment registration.

#### 14. Will the results be made available?

The results will be made available to your school the week of September 23, 2024 via mail and online. 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. The Montana Department of Health will also make technical assistance available to assist schools with use of the reports.

#### 15. How will this information be used?

Information from the MPNA survey can also be used to meet a variety of needs at the community and state levels. (Please review answer to Question # 3 for information on how results can be utilized at the district level.)

- The survey provides information that can be used to identify various problem behaviors. This information can be used as input for resource and policy decisions, such as targeting interventions. Those who receive the information may choose to share it with other community organizations.
- 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 state-level data can be used to compare results to national surveys on drug use.
- At the state and federal levels, there are a variety of 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 that are revealed to be important.
- 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.

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.

In previous years, Prevention Specialists have utilized data to support prevention efforts with their local schools which completed the survey. In 2020, a total of 10 communities were able to coordinate prevention efforts. However, in 2022 32 communities had reliable data to further the prevention efforts with their local schools. Reliable data is needed to continue pursuing prevention funding and it is imperative for prevention specialists and schools to work together in gathering the data to support funding efforts.

#### **16. How reliable is the use of student self-report data?**

Reliability is the property related to whether the survey will consistently elicit similar results under similar conditions. A pre-requisite of validity is that the measure has adequate reliability. Reliability as assessed through coefficient alpha which is essentially a measure of how well the questions “hang together” to assess a singular underlying construct (i.e., substance use behavior). Surveys are compared year over year as well as with other surveys of similar types to ensure that they consistently collect reliable and valid data. The questionnaires are also designed with validity checks that remove invalid or dishonest surveys from the data set to ensure that the data collected is reliable.

#### **17. 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 the questionnaire can be sent to William Gardner for future consideration.

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? No, for the same reason already given. However, all comments will be given careful consideration including those to remove a question for future iterations of the survey instrument. Additionally, a student can choose not to answer a question he or she is uncomfortable answering.

**18. Who can I call for further information?**

Your local Prevention Provider Specialist or the contractor, ISA/dba Pride Surveys:

Melissa Stephens

Director of Operations

ISA/dba Pride Surveys

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