PENNSYLVANIA YOUTH SURVEY
IT PAYS TO ASK. IT PAYS TO KNOW.

Pennsylvania Youth Survey
Passive Parental/Caregiver Permission Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Our school is taking part in the 2023 Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) sponsored by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs. The survey will ask questions about the behaviors of students in the 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades, including questions about school climate, mental health, violence, bullying, and substance use.

The information we receive will assist us and our community partners in working to promote mental health and prevent substance use and other problem behaviors. We want to ensure that all parents and caregivers are notified the survey is being conducted as well as provide you with as much information about the survey as possible. As a parent or caregiver, you have the right to prohibit your child's participation. The following facts about the survey will help you make an informed decision:

- Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. Students will be instructed by their proctor that they can skip any questions they do not understand or choose not to answer. If they have any questions or concerns after taking this survey, they are instructed to talk with their school counselor or a trusted adult.

- The survey is designed to protect each student's privacy; it is anonymous and confidential. Students will not put their names on the survey, and no student will ever have their individual responses reported.

- The survey is well tested, having been administered to over 2 million Pennsylvania students since the 1990's. The information collected has proved invaluable to prevention planners in selecting programming to promote healthy youth development.

You can request a list of the survey questions by visiting this link: https://www.episcenter.psu.edu/index.php/paysquestion. For more information about the survey, including a list of Frequently Asked Questions, please visit www.pays.pa.gov then click on "2023."

The survey will be administered during the school day later this fall and will take one class period to complete. If you do not want your child to participate, please submit your request to your main principal office in writing.

Thank you for your help in our efforts to keep our schools drug free and safe for learning. If you have any questions, please contact Pete Cheddar, Superintendent, at 570 339 1500 ext 3113.

2023 PAYS

Pennsylvania Youth Survey

PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

Information about the 2023 PAYS and answers to the most frequently asked questions.

Introduction

From September to November 2023, the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) will be conducted throughout the state. PAYS has been conducted every other year since 1989. **In the most recent administration, 385 school districts and non-traditional schools in 66 counties participated in PAYS.** In 2023, PAYS will again be offered to all public, private, and charter schools in the state at NO COST, thanks to the sponsorship of the state agency partners. This fact sheet provides answers to questions you may have about the 2023 PAYS.

PAYS is supported by:
Pennsylvania Department of Education, Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, and Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency

PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Pennsylvania Youth Survey?

The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) is a biennial survey of youth in the 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades. PAYS asks questions about students' perspectives of their school environment, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors concerning mental health, alcohol, tobacco, other drugs (ATOD), violence, and other health risk behaviors. The survey also collects information about risk factors, which are the conditions that increase the likelihood that a child will develop problem behaviors later in life. It also collects information about protective factors – people or conditions in a community that can buffer youth from risk.

What is the purpose of PAYS?

PAYS gathers local data and information needed to identify appropriate prevention and intervention programs to address such problems as mental health concerns, substance use, and violence in our schools and communities. Schools, government agencies, local stakeholders, and community prevention coalitions use PAYS data to assess issues facing youth in a community, identify programming that can be used to address the locally-identified problems, select curricula, and demonstrate the need for funding through grant submissions and presentations to potential funders. It also helps schools, districts, and counties judge the effectiveness of current prevention and intervention efforts and to make appropriate corrections. In addition, PAYS seeks youth input on protective factors or supports in their communities; family lives, and interpersonal relationships that help them succeed in life. Through PAYS data, especially the risks faced by and protections available to youth, communities can utilize a data-driven decision-making process to use limited prevention resources best.

PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

What schools are eligible to participate?

In 2023, PAYS is once again being offered to all schools, including public, private, parochial, cyber, and charter schools in Pennsylvania, at no charge. School District Superintendents (or Charter/Private Schools Senior Administrators) are invited to participate by completing the registration form available at www.PAYS.pa.gov.

Why should my school participate?

PAYS is the only survey offered in Pennsylvania that collects the level of detailed risk and protective factor data used to identify individual community needs. Schools, school districts, and counties can then work with local prevention partners to select and implement appropriate services that address the specific risk and protective factors identified by PAYS data. Reports (generated at state, county, and school levels) produced from the results will provide information on problems such as mental health concerns, substance use, and bullying ad the risk and protective factors, such as commitment to the school, that influence those problems. PAYS gives youth a voice in the decisions being made for them. This perspective is often missing from prevention planning discussions.

Furthermore, PAYS results can be used to help ensure that participating counties continue to make essential prevention funding available, which benefits area school districts, schools, and the community. PAYS data can be used to inform local funding decisions, included in grant applications to state and federal government, and included in funding requests from foundations and private sector funders.

PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

Is student participation anonymous?

Yes, completely anonymous and confidential.

Students who complete the paper-based survey are given a survey booklet that contains the question items and a place for them to record responses. The survey booklet will not contain the student's name, or any other identifying information. Before they begin, students are to be reminded 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 their responses cannot be seen by the proctor administering the survey or by any of the student's peers. At the end of the class period, the survey booklets will immediately be placed in an envelope by each student. The envelope will be sealed. Contacts at each school will pick up the completed surveys in the sealed envelopes and ship them directly to the PAYS vendor, Bach Harrison, L.L.C., in Salt Lake City, Utah, using a prepaid FedEx Ground label.

Students who complete the survey online are given an anonymous link. Online responses do not include the student's name or other identifying information.

Are sensitive questions asked?

The survey includes questions related to alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; violent behaviors; mental health; other health risk behaviors; and related risk and protective factors. The survey questions are designed to measure attitudes and behaviors. Unless questions in these topic areas are asked directly, prevention planners cannot know the degree to which the youth in Pennsylvania engage in these health risk behaviors. It is important to remember the survey is anonymous and confidential, so no student's responses can be connected with that student. Students are informed that they may also skip any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering or that they do not understand. They are also informed that if they have any questions or concerns after taking the survey, they can talk with their school counselor or a trusted adult. Research shows asking youth about these health risk behaviors does not make them more likely to engage in that behavior.[1]

1: https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(17)30327-0/fulltext , https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24998511/

PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

Can I see the 2023 PAYS survey questions?

A copy of the questions on the 2023 PAYS can be requested on this website: http://www.pays.pa.gov/.

What if a parent does not wish their child to participate?

School PAYS Coordinators will be working with schools to distribute passive parental consent forms (or active consent forms in the event a school chooses that approach). Passive parental consent forms will inform parents and caregivers about the survey and instruct them to contact the principal's office to opt their child out of participating in the survey. The School PAYS Coordinator will ensure that students who do not have parental or caregiver permission will not take the survey.

If a parent does decline, their child will be allowed to read or participate in some other alternate activity while their classmates are taking the survey. If a school district or school chooses to gather active parental consent, School PAYS Coordinators will work with each school to ensure that parental consent forms are received and that only students with parental consent are given the survey.

Contact your local school district or school for more information about specific consent policies and procedures.

What will students be asked to do?

The students will be asked to complete a self-administered survey questionnaire during one class period at school, either via paper and pencil or electronically online, as chosen by their school. The student will be asked to read each question and select the answer that most closely matches the way they feel. All questions are self-reported, and no student information can be identified from the completed surveys. PAYS is also available in a Spanish language version. Schools can request copies of the Spanish version from the vendor, Bach-Harrison.

PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

How long does it take to complete PAYS?

The survey will take approximately 40 minutes to complete and is designed to 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 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.

When will PAYS be conducted?

The survey will be administered from **September 18, 2023, through November 17, 202322, 2023**, at a time chosen by each local school district and/or school. Within a given school, the survey should be administered to all participating classes during the same class period when possible. This will help avoid students from discussing the questions with classmates who have not completed the survey and bias the results.

How does the School PAYS Coordinator help with the survey?

The School PAYS Coordinator, who is selected by each school's superintendent, will work with school principals to set an appropriate and convenient survey date, develop a passive parental consent process, and distribute and then collect survey materials. The Coordinator can be a school official or a community prevention partner. Schools that have worked with a community or county partner to facilitate PAYS in past administrations are strongly encouraged to do so again.

What will schools be asked to do?

The survey will be administered in the classroom setting by school staff or a community prevention partner. Administration protocol will be decided by each individual School Entity. Bach Harrison will provide each school with the necessary materials for completing the survey, including proctoring instructions 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.

PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

How will the results be made available?

Summary Reports containing local data will be generated at the state, county, and school levels. The reports will provide levels of health-related behaviors; alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; antisocial behavior; the factors that place students at risk for problem behaviors and protect them from problem behaviors. School-level reports will be provided to the school district superintendent/senior administrator in hard copy and electronic formats no later than April 30, 2024. County-level reports will be available through County Drug and Alcohol Offices and also on the PAYS website at www.pays.pa.gov, then click "2023". The statewide and county-level reports will contain only aggregate information; individual district results will not be listed separately in these reports.

How can my school and community benefit from this survey?

PAYS is a holistic approach to learning about students' attitudes and behaviors that represents the entirety of a student's environment – the community, their school, their family, and their peers/self. Information gained from participating in the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) allows schools, districts, and communities to receive detailed reports (as described above), and also provide the community with a wealth of data to be used for grant writing, program and school safety planning, as well as targeting interventions to meet a school's and community's specific needs. The survey provides information that can be used to identify the incidence of various health risk behaviors. Additionally, by tracking data over multiple PAYS administrations, prevention planners can assess the impact of programs and services over time. Results of the survey are used to determine the need for prevention services and services to support their work toward achieving academic and personal goals.

QUESTIONS AND REGISTRATION

If you have any questions, please visit http://www.pays.pa.gov/ . If you need additional information about PAYS, please contact Alise Barr, PAYS Support & Development Specialist, at arh184@psu.edu.

To register to participate in the 2023 PAYS, please contact your Bach Harrison Support Team at payssupport@bach-harrison.com .
Team Members providing support include: Mary Johnstun, Shay Larke, and Julia Schildwachter