# Superintendent’s Memo #242-20


**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education**

DATE: September 18, 2020

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

## SUBJECT: 2021 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions

The purpose of this memorandum is to notify school divisions that the 2021 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions will be administered to schools beginning January 11, 2021, and ending March 19, 2021 through a partnership between the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). To reduce survey administrative burden, the Virginia School Survey combines two required survey efforts into a single survey instrument and administration cycle:

* VDOE’s Teacher and Staff Working Conditions Surveys, last implemented in 2019, as required by [Item 143.G of the 2020 Appropriation Act](https://budget.lis.virginia.gov/item/2020/1/HB30/Chapter/1/143/); and
* DCJS’s Secondary School Climate Surveys, last implemented in 2020 in grades nine through 12, as required by the [*Code of Virginia §22.1-279.8.B*](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter14/section22.1-279.8/).

The COVID-19 pandemic has created uncertain and evolving circumstances through which schools continue to provide educational services to students. We recognize that this public health crisis will affect schools and students for years to come. As teachers, staff, and students adapt to new instructional circumstances, it is critically important that we understand the impact of the pandemic on climate and working conditions, and continue to monitor our progress towards recovery. The Virginia School Survey becomes a tool for division leaders and principals to monitor and ensure all students and staff have access to a healthy and positive environment in which to learn, work, interact, and grow, whether remotely or in-person.

For 2021, schools with regular education programs for students in grades six through eight are required to administer the student survey. In addition, divisions may choose to administer the survey to students in grades six through eight in other educational settings (e.g., alternative or specialty centers). It is recommended that schools survey all students in participating schools, so that they have the most complete and accurate information about their school. Schools unable to survey all students will have the option of surveying a random sample of 25 students within each grade. Schools surveying all students should achieve a participation rate of at least 80 percent. Schools choosing the random sample option must follow a random number procedure to select at least 25 students in each grade to complete the survey. Alternates will also be randomly selected so that at least 25 students in each grade complete the survey. If preferred, divisions may select one sampling strategy (all students or a random sample) for all participating schools in the division.

Schools are also required to administer the companion survey for adults to all licensed staff (instructional and support personnel) in all public elementary and secondary schools, regardless of grades served. The adult survey may also be administered to non-licensed staff, and may be administered to adults in other educational settings (e.g., alternative or specialty centers) at the discretion of the school division. The student and adult surveys will be administered concurrently.

In October 2020, schools will be asked to select a three-week period to administer the surveys between January 11 and March 19, 2021. If preferred, divisions can select a division-wide administration window. All surveys are completed online and can be accessed through any device with an internet connection.

The Virginia School Survey is anonymous. Participants will not give their names on the survey, and it will not be possible to match survey answers to participant identities. Although teachers and staff will be asked to identify their role in the school, responses will be aggregated in school reports to protect their identity. A breakdown of results by role will be provided in the statewide report, but not in individual school reports.

Student and adult participation is voluntary, but recommended. Parents of students identified for participation in the survey will be advised by a standard letter and offered the option of declining to participate. Adults will be offered the same option. It is valuable to have a high participation rate, so we ask divisions and principals to encourage their students, teachers and other staff members to participate.

Schools will receive a detailed report of survey results and will be able to compare their results to regional and state averages. Technical information on survey results will be made available with the assistance of researchers from the School of Education at Virginia Tech and the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia.

Divisions may link additional survey questions on local initiatives to the state survey. Divisions will be provided an opportunity to review the Virginia School Survey prior to developing additional local survey questions, to reduce duplication of survey items. Web links for additional survey questions must be provided to DCJS by December 4, 2020. Additional instruction on submitting web links is forthcoming.

Complete instructions for random student sampling and administering the survey will be made available on the [Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety website](http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/school-safety-survey/secondary-school-climate-survey) and the [VDOE Working Conditions and Climate Survey page](http://doe.virginia.gov/support/school-climate/index.shtml). Principals will also receive specific instructions via email. VDOE and DCJS will host a webinar on survey administration. Registration information for the webinar is forthcoming. Future communications about the survey will be distributed through a specific email address created for this survey (vaschoolsurvey@dcjs.virginia.gov) that will be monitored by VDOE and DCJS personnel.

Divisions have several choices to determine how the survey is administered in their schools, including:

* + Choosing a division-wide survey administration window, if preferred;
	+ Choosing a division-wide student sampling strategy, if preferred; and
	+ Selecting any optional schools for survey participation.

Divisions must notify VDOE and DCJS of these decisions by September 30, 2020 via a web form to be distributed to school divisions by DCJS within the next week. Through this web form, divisions are also asked to identify a primary point of contact with whom DCJS and VDOE can communicate updates on survey administration, and to confirm principal contact information for participating schools.

Questions about the Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions may be directed to Nikki Wilcox, Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety, at nikki.wilcox@dcjs.virginia.gov or 804-786-3923 and Dr. Jennifer Piver-Renna, Director, Office of Research, at jennifer.piver-renna@doe.virginia.gov or 804-225-3698.

JFL/JPR