



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

April 26, 2013

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Patricia I. Wright, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: Virginia Youth Survey

The purpose of this memo is to inform you that the Virginia Youth Survey, developed by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY) with the support of the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), will be administered in grades six through twelve during October and November 2013. The 2011 General Assembly adopted Article 15 § 32.1-73.8 of the *Code of Virginia* to require the administration of the survey as follows:

The Department [of Health] shall, in cooperation with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and the Superintendent of Public Instruction, develop and administer a survey of students to facilitate planning and implementation of effective programs for the prevention of substance abuse through collection of data and information to (i) identify trends in the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs and (ii) assess the prevalence of risk and protective factors among the youth of the Commonwealth. In developing such survey, the Department may utilize all or part of an existing survey designed to collect such information developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The survey shall be anonymous and administered in a manner designed to protect students' privacy. Schools shall be randomly selected for participation in the survey. Schools selected to participate in the survey shall notify students and parents pursuant to § 22.1-79.3. A student whose parents have refused to consent to the student's participation in the survey as provided in § 22.1-79.3 shall not be required to participate in the survey.

Although schools are required to participate in the survey, participation by students is voluntary. Parents have the right to review the survey prior to administration and to deny consent for their children's participation. Written notification must be given to parents by the school division at least 30 days before administration. The *Code*, at § 22.1-79.3, states:

Local school boards shall develop and implement policies to notify parents of each student enrolled in a middle or high school selected for participation in the survey of student health risk behaviors pursuant to § 32.1-73.8, in writing and at least 30 days prior to administration of the survey, that their child may be randomly selected to participate in the survey unless the parent denies consent for the student's participation in writing prior to administration of the survey. The notice shall inform the parent regarding the nature and types of questions included in the survey, the purposes and age-appropriateness of the survey, how information collected by the survey will be used, who will have access to such information, whether and how any findings or results will be disclosed, and the steps that will be taken to protect students' privacy. Parents shall have the right to review the survey prior to administration of the survey.

Survey administration procedures are designed to protect student privacy and allow for anonymous participation. School divisions, schools, and students will not be identified in any published report.

A total of 270 randomly selected schools will be asked to participate in the survey. If schools in your division are selected, you and the principals of the selected schools will be contacted by the Virginia Department of Health's (VDH) Virginia Youth Survey staff, which will provide sample language for parental notification.

Three to six randomly selected classrooms in an identified middle or high school will participate in the survey. The survey will require one class period to administer and will consist of sixty-nine multiple choice questions for middle school and ninety-nine for high school. A classroom teacher, a survey administrator provided by the Virginia Department of Health, or other school personnel may administer the survey. All materials required to administer the survey will be provided by the Virginia Department of Health. Completed answer sheets and surveys will be collected at each school site by a VDH's Virginia Youth Survey staff member or a mailer will be provided.

School and community stakeholders have reviewed the survey and believe it provides useful aggregated statewide and regional data for future program planning, curriculum development, policy development, school improvement plans, wellness policies, and grant applications. The survey focuses on those priority health-risk behaviors established during youth that result in the most significant mortality and morbidity during both youth and adulthood. It provides information on behaviors that result in unintentional injuries and violence; tobacco use; alcohol and other drug use; unhealthy dietary behaviors; and physical inactivity.

Thank you for your cooperation. Should you have any further questions, please contact Danielle Henderson, the Virginia Department of Health's Virginia Youth Survey project coordinator, at 804-864-7649, or by e-mail at danielle.henderson@vdh.virginia.gov or Tia Campbell, the Virginia Department of Education's school health specialist, at 804-786-8671, or by e-mail at tia.campbell@doe.virginia.gov.

PIW/TC/sgc