

October 13, 2023

Dear Parent or Guardian of an **Eighth, Tenth, and Twelfth Grade Student:**

The Fairfax County Youth Survey, a collaboration between the Fairfax County School Board and the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, is a comprehensive, anonymous, and voluntary survey given each year to students in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12. The survey examines behaviors, experiences and other factors that influence the health and well-being of Fairfax County's youth. The results, published each year at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/youthsurvey>, identify trends and areas of need, providing a snapshot of the county's youth and serving as a barometer of the community's effectiveness in fostering healthy choices in young people.

Fairfax County Public Schools has been administering the Youth Survey since 2001, with the sixth-grade survey developed for administration in 2008. The majority of the questions currently on the survey were selected from nationally recognized surveys, including the [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System \(YRBS\)](#) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the [Monitoring the Future \(MTF\)](#) survey through the National Institute of Health. Millions of students across the country have taken these surveys since YRBS began surveying youth in 1991 and MTF began in 1975. Using questions from these national surveys helps to ensure that the county has national comparisons to use as a benchmark. It also ensures that the questions measure what they are intended to measure, as the questions meet scientific standards of reliability and validity. Mechanisms are also incorporated to detect invalid responses to survey questions and several internal reliability checks help identify falsified answers.

The survey is conducted during school hours, online during one class period and is offered in eight languages. It is completely anonymous, and responses cannot be traced back to your child's personal information or linked to a computer, e-mail address, or other electronic identifiers. No personally identifiable information or IP addresses are recorded. Survey responses are stored in a secure server which is compliant with federal data security standards. To further protect students' anonymity, the responses are read and analyzed only by the researchers and summarized in a report with no personal identifiers. All results are presented at a group, or aggregate, level.

The Fairfax County Youth Survey asks questions about risky behavior, mental health, physical health, and safety, including questions about drug use, bullying and depression. Students are also asked about the positive aspects of their lives and activities, as well as specific protective factors concerning health and safety, including participating in extracurricular activities. Reinforcing protective factors can help young people be more resilient when confronting risk factors and risky behaviors.

Some questions that may be considered sensitive, for example, questions regarding suicide, sexual behavior, and transgender status, are included in recognition of the importance of these topics and are presented in a straightforward and sensitive manner. These questions are asked **ONLY** of students in eighth, tenth, and twelfth grade, as sixth grade students take a shortened, modified survey. In addition, there is no evidence that asking students about health risk

behaviors will encourage them to attempt those behaviors. In fact, there are studies that provide evidence that asking sensitive questions such as these may actually reduce the likelihood of engaging in these behaviors.

County, school, and community-based organizations rely on the results to assess youth needs and strengths, develop programs, monitor trends, measure countywide outcomes, and guide countywide planning of prevention efforts. The survey is also an important tool for measuring student achievement goals related to essential life skills and responsibility to the community. Most importantly, the survey gives parents, youth, and community members a sense of our challenges and our strengths and how to build upon those strengths.

You have the right to preview the survey and may deny permission for your child to participate, if you desire, and the student will be assigned an alternative activity during the survey administration. Additionally, if at any time a student is uncomfortable with any question on the survey, the student may skip that question or may elect to discontinue the survey entirely.

The survey will be administered between November 29 and December 8, 2023, during a time of day determined by your child's school administration. A copy of the survey will be available to parents and/or guardians online at <https://www.fcps.edu/resources/student-safety-and-wellness/youth-survey> and in the school counseling office of your child's school beginning September 30, 2023.

While it is our hope that as many students as possible will participate, if you do not wish for your child to take part in the survey, please complete the attached form and return it to your child's school counselor no later than November 29, 2023.

If you have questions about the survey, please contact Stefan Mascoll, coordinator, Student Safety and Wellness Office, at 571-423-4270.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michelle C. Reid
Superintendent of Schools

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Attachment

**2023 Fairfax County Youth Survey
OPT-OUT FORM**

Complete this form **only** if you **do not** wish for your child to participate in the survey. Return it to your child's school counselor no later than November 29, 2023.

I do not give permission for my child to participate in the confidential *2023 Fairfax County Youth Survey*. I understand that my child will be assigned to an alternative activity during the administration of the survey.

Student's Name (please print): _____

Student's School (please print): _____ Grade: _____

Signature of Parent or Guardian: _____