



# FAQ

## WHAT IS SHARP?

- The Student Health and Risk Prevention (SHARP) Surveillance System is the umbrella that encompasses the coordinated administration of three school-based student health surveys in Nebraska, including the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS), and Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Student Survey (NRPFS).
- SHARP includes the ONLY three student health surveys endorsed by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS).
- All three surveys are administered at the same time in the fall of even calendar years with the next administration occurring Fall 2020.

## WHY PARTICIPATE IN SHARP?

The NDE and NDHHS are responsible for identifying and monitoring factors that may affect the health, learning, and quality of life of Nebraska youth. SHARP allows information to be collected on all of the key risk factors for youth at one time.

### YRBS

Of the three surveys the YRBS is the most comprehensive, asking about health behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death and disability among youth and young adults. These health behaviors include unintentional injuries and violence, mental health and suicide, tobacco, alcohol and other drug use, sexual risk behaviors, unhealthy dietary behaviors, and physical inactivity. The prevalence of obesity and asthma among youth is also measured.

The results of the YRBS are used to:

- o Improve school health education policies and programs
- o Provide data that can be used to access funding for school and community programs
- o Monitor how priority health risk behaviors among high school students change over time
- o Evaluate the impact of national, state, and local efforts to local prevention efforts

### YTS

The YTS is a statewide youth tobacco surveillance system designed by the CDC to help states improve the capacity to design, implement, and evaluate tobacco prevention and control programs for the purposes of preventing youth from using tobacco and helping current users quit. Having this information gives schools and communities the ability to design and/or select effective and locally-appropriate prevention strategies while supporting improvements in health and learning. The YTS collects data about the following:

- o Exposure to environmental smoke
- o Minors' access and enforcement
- o Knowledge and attitudes
- o Media and advertising
- o Tobacco use cessation
- o Prevalence of tobacco use (cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, e-cigarettes, cigars, and pipes)

## **NRPFSS**

The NRPFSS provides school districts and communities information on the following topic areas specific to their local region. These topics include:

- o Substance abuse, delinquent behavior, bullying, and risk and protective measures that predispose youth toward or protect them against problem behaviors (including substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, school dropout, and violence)
- o Risk and protective measures related to four domains (community, school, family, and individual/peer)

### **HOW ARE SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE?**

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) randomly select 82 public high schools for the YRBS and 62 schools for the YTS.
  - o Each school randomly selected is contacted and asked for a list of classes (e.g. second period or English classes) that encompasses all 9th-12th grade students. Using this list, classes are randomly selected for survey participation.
- The NRPFSS is a census survey so all public and private schools are eligible to participate.
  - o Students in the 8th, 10th, and 12th grades are surveyed at each participating school.
- The grades included in each survey are as follows:
  - o YRBS: Random sample of public high school students in grades 9-12
  - o YTS: Random sample of public high school students in grades 9-12
  - o NRPFSS: Census of public and non-public students in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades

### **HOW CAN ONE PARTICULAR SCHOOL BE 'RANDOMLY' SELECTED EACH YEAR?**

- The SHARP sampling design ensures that all students throughout the state have an equal chance to participate in the YRBS and YTS.
  - o Larger schools have a higher chance of being selected, because they have more students than smaller schools.
- Schools are scientifically selected to participate.
  - o This helps to ensure the data collected are representative of all the students in our state.
  - o If we picked schools we thought might be interested in participating or who volunteered, the data would not be representative and would not be as useful for improving school health policies, programs, and practices.

### **IS STUDENT PARTICIPATION ANONYMOUS?**

- YES!
  - o Before they begin, students are reminded that they should not write their name or any other identifying information on their materials.
  - o On the instruction form, emphasis is given to the survey administrator to provide each student with their own personal space to complete the survey.
  - o For the YRBS, students are provided with individual envelopes of survey materials. Once they have completed the survey, they place their materials in their individual envelope and seal it shut. The survey administrator then collects all the individual envelopes and seals them into a classroom envelope.
  - o For the YTS and NRPFSS students are provided a booklet. All of the completed booklets are collected by the classroom administrator, placed directly into a classroom envelope, and sealed shut.
  - o The survey administrator then sends all classroom envelopes to the Bureau of Sociological Research (BOSR) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) to be processed.

## **WHO IS THE BUREAU OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH (BOSR) AND WHY ARE THEY INVOLVED?**

- BOSR is the research division of the Department of Sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- BOSR has provided research and support services to UNL and local, state, and regional academic institutions, governmental agencies, and non-profits since 1964.
- BOSR began administering SHARP the fall of 2010 for NDE and NDHHS.

## **ARE QUESTIONS ON THE SURVEYS VALID AND RELIABLE?**

- When the questionnaires were developed, the questions were tested in cognitive laboratory settings, in focus groups, and in regular classrooms among diverse groups of students. The results of these tests were used to improve the quality of the questionnaires.
- Researchers not associated with survey development have conducted tests on these questionnaires. It has been found that these questionnaires produce credible data.
- All survey data are subjected to numerous checks during data processing to detect and eliminate inconsistent responses to improve the quality of the data.

## **ARE SENSITIVE QUESTIONS ASKED?**

- Yes, some questions are related to sensitive issues.
- To help solve health problems among our youth, we must first understand them.
  - The only way to learn if youth are at risk is to ask questions about all health-related behaviors.
- Care has been taken to write survey questions in a direct, but sensitive way.
- Survey questions are available at <http://bosr.unl.edu/sharp> for viewing.

## **DOES ASKING A STUDENT ABOUT A RISKY HEALTH BEHAVIOR (E.G., TOBACCO USE) INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THEY WILL PRACTICE THAT BEHAVIOR?**

- There is no scientific evidence that health-risk behaviors can be changed simply by reading a question about them.

## **WHY SHOULD WE ASK OUR STUDENTS TO COMPLETE A SURVEY RELATED TO HEALTH-RISK BEHAVIORS WHEN WE HAVE NO PROBLEMS RELATED TO HEALTH IN OUR SCHOOL?**

- It might be true that all students in your school are managing a healthy lifestyle. However, we cannot know for sure unless we ask the students directly.
- To make sure the data are truly representative of students throughout the state we need to include both students who engage in healthy behaviors as well as those who practice risky health behaviors.
- If any students in a school are engaging in behaviors that put their health at risk, policies, programs, and practices need to be developed to change these behaviors. The data from these surveys can assist with this process.
- We need to base interventions on what students are really doing, not on adults' perceptions of students' behaviors and attitudes.

## **HOW CAN WE ENCOURAGE A CONSERVATIVE COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT THE SURVEYS?**

- We are convinced that most parents believe important health topics should be addressed. To do that effectively, school health policies, programs, and practices should be based on credible data.
- Individuals who have questions or concerns are invited to contact Mekenzie Kerr at 402-472-6733 or e-mail [mkerr4@unl.edu](mailto:mkerr4@unl.edu), and she will be happy to provide assistance.
- All materials need to be available to parents and interested community members.
  - These materials can be made available in each school's main office, or anyone can visit the SHARP website at <http://bosr.unl.edu/sharp> to view the materials at their leisure.

- This FAQ document will be available on the SHARP website and a condensed version is also included in the consent forms available on the SHARP website.

## **WHAT IS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT STUDENTS WILL TELL THE TRUTH?**

- The questionnaire design and survey administration procedures help make students feel comfortable and encourage honesty.
- Getting truthful data is very important to us, so every precaution will be taken to ensure each student's privacy.
  - As mentioned above, the students are told not to put their names on any of the materials, instruction forms for survey administrators emphasize the need to provide students with a quiet, private place to complete the survey, and when students are done the surveys will be placed in an envelope and sealed shut.
- The purpose of the survey is explained to the students and it is emphasized that the data are not helpful if they are not an honest representation of what the students are or are not doing.
- Students are told that if they cannot answer a question honestly they are to leave it blank.

## **HOW CAN YOU EXPECT SCHOOLS TO INTERRUPT ACADEMIC SCHEDULES TO DO ANOTHER SURVEY?**

- We understand that academic achievement and improving test scores are each school's top priorities.
- However, we also know that there is strong evidence that healthy students learn better. Many studies have shown that students who do not engage in the health risk behaviors assessed by these surveys have higher grades and test scores.
- To improve academic achievement and ensure that students do not engage in health risk behaviors, it is critical to implement quality school health policies, programs, and community practices based on data provided by these surveys.
- Along with your many requirements, we also understand you receive several requests like this each year. However, we encourage school officials to make SHARP one of their priorities because of its state and national accreditation and the fact that survey results can have a very positive impact on school and community programs in our state.

## **SINCE SHARP IS NOW THE UMBRELLA CONNECTING THE YRBS, YTS, AND NRPFS, ARE WE EXPECTED TO DO ALL THREE SURVEYS?**

- Participation is voluntary, but we strongly encourage participation in the surveys for which your school is eligible.
- All Nebraska schools, public and private, are invited to participate in the NRPFS. For 2020, 82 public high schools will be randomly selected for the YRBS. Then 62 public high schools will be selected for the YTS.
- If your school is eligible for more than one survey and you choose to participate, we can arrange for administration of all surveys on one day or you can select different days for each of the surveys.
  - There is a small chance that your school could be eligible for all three surveys if your local health department conducts a YRBS oversample for your specific area.
  - In this instance, surveys would be distributed to different classrooms with the intention of minimizing the number of students that have to fill out more than one survey.

## **WHO IS SUPPOSED TO TAKE ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SCHEDULING AND ADMINISTERING THESE SURVEYS?**

- BOSR will work with you to find the best time in your schedule to administer the surveys.
- BOSR can provide examples of parent/guardian consent forms. Directives for handling the consent forms can also be provided to the person(s) in your school system that will be managing the distribution and collection of these forms.
- When it is time to conduct the surveys we will send all of the materials and instructions as needed to the person(s) in your system (i.e. guidance counselor or office manager) that will be managing the distribution and collection of the survey.

## DO ANY OF THE SURVEYS PROVIDE DATA RELEVANT TO THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA) DATA COLLECTION REQUIREMENTS?

• Yes, the YRBS does provide data relevant to the ESSA requirements of evaluation, needs assessment, and measures of effectiveness.

1. Title IV-21st Century Schools, Part A-Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants Sec, 4108.

“Subject to section 4106(f), each local educational agency, or consortium of such agencies, that receives an allocation under section 4105(a) shall use a portion of such funds to develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive programs . . . “

(A) drug violence prevention . . .

(B) in accordance with sections 4001 and 4111

(i) school-based mental health services . . .

(C) programs or activities that

(i) integrate health and safety practices into school programs . . .

2. Title IV-21st Century Schools Part B-21st Century Community Learning Centers, Sec. 4201. Purpose; Definitions.

(a) Purpose.—The purpose of this part is to provide opportunities for communities to establish or expand activities in community learning centers that—

(2) offer students a broad array of additional services, programs, and activities, such as youth development activities, service learning, nutrition and health education, drug and violence prevention programs, counseling programs, arts, music, physical fitness and wellness programs, technology education programs, financial literacy programs, environmental literacy programs, mathematics, science, career and technical programs, internship or apprenticeship programs, and other ties to an in-demand industry sector or occupation for high school students that are designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program of participating students;

Sec. 4203. State Application.

(14) describes how the State educational agency will evaluate the effectiveness of programs and activities carried out under this part, which shall include, at a minimum—

“(A) a description of the performance indicators and performance measures that will be used to evaluate programs and activities with emphasis on alignment with the regular academic program of the school and the academic needs of participating students, including performance indicators and measures that— . . .

“(ii) include State assessment results and other indicators of student success and improvement, such as improved attendance during the school day, better classroom grades, regular (or consistent) program attendance, and on-time advancement to the next grade level; and . . .

“(B) a description of how data collected for the purposes of subparagraph (A) will be collected; and . . .

Sec. 4205. Local Activities.

(a) Authorized Activities.

(4) programs that support a healthy and active lifestyle, including nutritional education and regular, structured physical activity programs;

(12) drug and violence prevention programs and counseling programs;

(b) Measures of Effectiveness.

(1) In General. —For a program or activity developed pursuant to this part to meet the measures of effectiveness, . . .

(A) be based upon an assessment of objective data regarding the need for before and after school (or summer recess) programs and activities in the schools and communities;

(2) Periodic Evaluation.

(B) Use of Results.

“(i) used to refine, improve, and strengthen the program or activity, and to refine the performance measures;

“(ii) made available to the public upon request, with public notice of such availability provided; and

“(iii) used by the State to determine whether a subgrant is eligible to be renewed under section 4204(j).

## **DO THE SURVEYS UNDER SHARP HELP FULFILL OTHER REPORTING REQUIREMENTS IN NEBRASKA?**

- Yes, several community-level grant programs are required to collect and report community data collected under SHARP.
  - A few grant programs include: The Drug Free Communities (DFC), community level grants from the Nebraska Crime Commission, and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services of Behavioral Health’s federal block grant awards and their Strategic Prevention Framework – Partnership for Success grant.
  - In addition, other state, community, and school groups (such as tobacco prevention coalitions) use the data for program monitoring and evaluation.

## **HOW HAVE THE DATA BEEN USED IN NEBRASKA?**

- The data have been used to strengthen local and state grant applications, and, to date, the surveys under SHARP have helped bring millions of dollars to Nebraska communities for the development and implementation of health-related interventions.
- The data have been used for program planning and evaluation of interventions aimed at reducing adolescent risk factors. This includes use by the Nebraska Legislature when new legislation is being created.
- The data have also been used to create public awareness of important health issues affecting Nebraska youth.

## **HOW DO SCHOOLS BENEFIT FROM SHARP?**

- Schools who participate in the NRPFS will be provided with a school district report, along with the opportunity to request individual school reports.
  - All of this is provided at no cost to the schools, and basic reporting rules protecting student anonymity are met.
- Results will strengthen school and community grant applications.
- Data help fulfill federal reporting requirements.
- Schools participating in SHARP may request specific information regarding prevention programs available and support services related to any health topic.
- Please contact your Regional Prevention Systems Coordinator for additional information regarding available prevention programs.