

# Pennsylvania Youth Survey 2013

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **PAYS is supported by:**

Pennsylvania Department of Education, Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency

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From mid-September through the end of November 2013, the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) will be conducted throughout the state. The PAYS has been conducted every other year since 1989. In the most recent administration, 322 school districts and 40 counties participated in the PAYS. In 2013, the PAYS is being 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 important questions you may have about the 2013 PAYS.

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[What is the Pennsylvania Youth Survey?](#)

The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) is a biennial survey of youth in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. The PAYS asks questions about students' attitudes, knowledge and behaviors concerning alcohol, tobacco, other drugs (ATOD), violence and other problem 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, and it also collects information about protective factors – people or conditions in a community that can buffer a youth from risk.

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## What is the purpose of the PAYS?

PAYS serves to gather local data and information needed to select appropriate prevention and intervention programs to address such problems as alcohol, tobacco, other drug 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, benchmarking the levels of use of various ATODs, identifying programming that can be used to address locally-identified issues, planning curricula, and demonstrating the need for funding through grant submissions and presentations to potential funders. It also helps schools, districts, and counties to judge the effectiveness of current prevention and intervention efforts and to make appropriate corrections. PAYS seeks youth input on protective factors or supports in their communities, family lives, and interpersonal relationships that help them to succeed in life. Through the use of local PAYS data, especially the risks faced by and protections available to youth, communities can utilize a data-driven decision-making process to make the best use of limited prevention resources.

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## What schools are eligible to participate?

In 2013, the PAYS is being offered to all schools including public, private, parochial, 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.state.pa.us](http://www.PAYS.state.pa.us).

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## Why should my school district participate?

The 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 to address the specific risk and protective factors identified by PAYS data. Reports (generated at state, county, and school district levels) produced from the survey results will provide information regarding health-related behaviors; alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; antisocial behavior; the factors that place students at risk for problem behaviors; and those that protect them from high-risk behaviors. PAYS gives youth a voice in the decisions being made on their behalf, a perspective that is often missing from prevention planning discussions.

Furthermore, the PAYS results can be used to help ensure that the state and participating counties continue to make available important prevention funding which directly or indirectly benefits area school districts, schools, and the community at large. Information gathered through the PAYS can be used to inform local funding decisions, can be included in grant applications to state and federal government, and included in requests for funding from foundations and private sector funders.

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## Is student participation anonymous?

Yes, completely anonymous and confidential. Students 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 that 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 teacher 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 a sealed envelope by each student. 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.D. in Salt Lake City, Utah, using a prepaid FedEx Ground label.

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## Are sensitive questions asked?

The survey includes questions related to alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; violent behaviors; other health risk behaviors; and related risk and protective factors. The survey questions have been designed to measure knowledge 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 will ever be able to be connected with that student. Students may also skip any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering or that they do not understand.

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## Can I see the 2013 PAYS survey instrument?

A copy of the survey instrument that will be used in 2013 is available on the PAYS website. Please visit [www.PAYS.state.pa.us](http://www.PAYS.state.pa.us), then click on the link for "2013". All the materials necessary to conduct the survey will be sent to your school district's PAYS Coordinator, and they will also be posted at this location for public access.

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

District 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 about the survey and instruct them to contact the principal's office if they do not wish their child to take the survey. The District PAYS Coordinator will work with individual schools to ensure that children whose parents declined their permission to participate do not take the survey. If a parent does decline, their son or daughter will be allowed to read or participate in some other alternate activity while his or her classmates are taking the

survey. If a school district or school chooses to gather active parental consent, District PAYS Coordinators will work with each school to ensure that parental consent forms are properly gathered and that only students with parental consent are given the survey.

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## 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 depending on which method the school selects. The same questions are used in the same order no matter which method is used. The student will be asked to read each question and select the answer in the survey booklet that most closely matches the way he/she feels. All questions are self-reported, and no physical tests or exams are involved. No individual student information can be identified from the completed surveys. Students requesting help in understanding a question may raise their hand and ask to have a question re-read by the proctor to the whole group, but the proctor will not read from the student's survey copy.

It should be noted that in addition to an English language version of the survey, PAYS will be available in a Spanish language version for students preferring to take the survey in Spanish due to barriers in English language literacy. Schools can request copies of the Spanish version and hand them out to students that choose that version. These versions will be collected and proctored in the same manner as the English version.

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## How long does it take to complete the PAYS?

The survey will take approximately 40 to 45 minutes to complete and will 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. Students who finish before the end of class will be asked to work quietly at their desks while their classmates finish.

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## When will the PAYS be conducted?

The survey will be administered from September 16, 2013 through November 27, 2013 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 discussing the questions with classmates who have not yet completed the survey and biasing the results.

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## How does the District PAYS Coordinator help with the survey?

The District PAYS Coordinator at the school district level will work with the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to help facilitate the survey. The District PAYS Coordinator, who is selected by each district's superintendent, will work with school principals to set an appropriate and convenient survey date, develop a passive parental consent process, and distribute and gather survey materials. The Coordinator can be a school official or a community prevention partner. Districts who have worked with a community partner to facilitate the PAYS in past administrations are strongly encouraged to do so again.

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## What will schools be asked to do?

The survey will be administered in the school classroom setting by the class teacher or a community prevention partner. Administration protocol will be decided by each individual School District. Bach Harrison will provide each school with the necessary materials for completing the survey, including proctoring instructions for administering the survey 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. The District PAYS Coordinator will be assisting schools through the process.

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## How will the results be made available?

Summary Reports containing local data will be generated at the state, county, and school district 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 district level reports will be provided to school district superintendents in both hard copy and electronic formats no later than April 30, 2014. County level reports will be available through County Drug and Alcohol Offices and will also be available on the PAYS website. The statewide and county-level reports will contain only aggregate information; individual district results will not be listed separately in these reports. An online data analysis tool will also be developed to allow for more detailed exploration of the results. Unlike past administrations, however, the full data set will not be provided at any level in order to meet human research subject protection provisions, as well as to adhere to appropriate Federal and State laws.

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## How can my school district 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 would 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 specialized needs. The survey provides information that can be used to identify the incidence of various problem 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 can be and have been used to provide evidence of the need for prevention services as well as the areas where students would benefit from those services to support their work toward achieving academic and personal goals

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## QUESTIONS AND REGISTRATION

If you have further questions about the PAYS, please contact:

**Geoff Kolchin, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency,  
Pennsylvania Youth Survey Project Leader at (717) 265-8483  
or by e-mail at [gkolchin@pa.gov](mailto:gkolchin@pa.gov)**

To register to participate in the 2013 PAYS, please contact:

**Mary Johnstun, Bach Harrison Project Coordinator, at (801) 842-2682  
or by e-mail at [mary@bach-harrison.com](mailto:mary@bach-harrison.com)**

Or visit [www.pays.state.pa.us](http://www.pays.state.pa.us)

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