

Pennsylvania Youth Survey 2021 - Frequently Asked Questions

PAYS is supported by:

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

From mid-September through the end of November 2021, the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) will be conducted throughout the state. PAYS has been conducted every other year since 1989. In the most recent administration, 1,144 schools from school districts and non-traditional schools in 66 counties participated in PAYS. In 2021, PAYS will again be 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 2021 PAYS.

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

[What is the purpose of PAYS?](#)

[What schools are eligible to participate?](#)

[Why should my school district participate?](#)

[Is student participation anonymous?](#)

[Are sensitive questions asked?](#)

[Can I see the 2021 PAYS survey questions?](#)

[What if a parent does not wish their child to participate?](#)

[What will students be asked to do?](#)

[How long does it take to complete PAYS?](#)

[How will the results be made available?](#)

[How can my school district/community benefit from this survey?](#)

[Who should I contact with questions or to register for PAYS?](#)

[Did questions related to the pandemic get added to the 2021 survey?](#)

What is the Pennsylvania Youth Survey?

The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) is a biennial survey of youth in the 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades. PAYS asks questions about students' perspectives of their school environment, as well as attitudes, knowledge and behaviors concerning alcohol, tobacco, other drugs (ATOD), violence, depression, 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.

[Return to top](#)

What is the purpose of 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, selecting 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.

[Return to top](#)

What schools are eligible to participate?

In 2021, PAYS is again being offered to all schools including public, private, parochial, cyber, and charter schools in Pennsylvania at no charge. School District Superintendents (or Charter/Private Schools Senior Administrators) are invited to register to participate by completing the registration form that is available at www.PAYS.pa.gov then clicking on “2021”.

[Return to top](#)

Why should my school district participate?

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, 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 PAYS can

be used to inform local funding decisions, can be included in grant applications to the state and federal governments, and can be included in requests for funding from foundations and private sector funders.

[Return to top](#)

Is student participation anonymous?

Yes, completely anonymous and confidential.

Students who complete the paper-based survey 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 proctor administering the survey or by any of the students' peers. At the end of the class period, the survey booklets will immediately be placed in an envelope by each student. The envelope will be sealed. 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.C., in Salt Lake City, Utah, using a prepaid FedEx Ground label.

Students who complete the survey online are given an anonymous link. Online responses do not include the student's name or other identifying information.

[Return to top](#)

Are sensitive questions asked?

The survey includes questions related to alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; violent behaviors; mental health; 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 students' responses will ever be connected with a particular student. Students are informed that they may also skip any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering or that they do not understand. They are also informed that if they have any questions or concerns after taking the survey, they can talk with their school counselor or a trusted adult.

[Return to top](#)

Can I see the 2021 PAYS survey questions?

A copy of the questions on the 2021 PAYS can be requested on this website:

<https://epis.psu.edu/paysquestion>.

[Return to top](#)

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 and caregivers about the survey and instruct them to contact the principal's office to opt their child out of participating in the survey. The District PAYS Coordinator will ensure that students who do not have parental or caregiver permission will not take the survey.

If a parent does decline, their child will be allowed to read or participate in some other alternate activity while 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.

Contact your local school district or school for more information about specific consent policies and procedures.

[Return to top](#)

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 as chosen by their school. The student will be asked to read each question and select the answer in the survey booklet or online survey that is most reflective of their lives. All questions are self-reported, and no individual student information can be identified from the completed surveys. PAYS is also available in a Spanish language version. Schools can request copies of the Spanish version from the vendor, Bach Harrison.

[Return to top](#)

How long does it take to complete PAYS?

The survey will take approximately 40 minutes to complete and is designed to be administered during a single class period (and less if taken online). 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 should not be concerned if they are not able to finish all of them.

[Return to top](#)

When will PAYS be conducted?

The survey will be administered from September 7, 2021, through November 19, 2021, 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.

[Return to top](#)

How does the District PAYS Coordinator help with 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 then collect survey materials. The Coordinator can be a school official or a community prevention partner. Districts who have worked with a community or county partner to facilitate PAYS in past administrations are strongly encouraged to do so again.

[Return to top](#)

What will schools be asked to do?

The survey will be administered in the classroom setting by school district staff 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.

[Return to top](#)

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, 2022. County level reports will be available through County Drug and Alcohol Offices and will also be available on the PAYS website at www.pays.pa.gov then click “2021”. The statewide and county-level reports will contain only aggregate information; individual district results will not be listed separately in these reports.

[Return to top](#)

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 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 specific 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 are used to determine the need for prevention services and services to support their work toward achieving academic and personal goals.

[Return to top](#)

Did questions related to the pandemic get added to the 2021 survey?

Yes. For the 2021 administration, PCCD and PDE have developed a series of questions that ask how COVID-19 impacted the participating students and their families, in both a negative and a positive way. Additionally, questions have been added that ask about students’ experiences with remote learning, if that was applicable in their case. Both sets of questions will only be available in the online version of the survey. To request a copy of the questions, please use this link: <https://epis.psu.edu/paysquestion>.

QUESTIONS AND REGISTRATION

If you have further questions about PAYS, please contact:

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

To register to participate in the 2021 PAYS, please contact:

Mary Johnstun
Bach Harrison Project Coordinator
(801) 842-2682
or by e-mail at mary@bach-harrison.com

Or visit www.pays.pa.gov, then “2021” to access the online registration link.

[Return to top](#)