

2023 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Overview

All school districts are **required** to notify parents/guardians in advance of the administration of the MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, and to give them the opportunity to opt out their child(ren) if desired. Doing so helps to protect the rights of parents and the students taking the survey. Our experience has been that very few parents (typically 1-2%) do not allow their child(ren) to participate.

IMPORTANT! Each district is **required** to send a copy of their parent letter to EDC for review and approval **prior to** sending it to parents. Please email your parent letter to Ramya Kumar(rkumar@edc.org) at least one week prior to when you are planning to distribute it.

Our procedures to protect the rights of participants involve:

1. ***Making sure all parents/guardians are fully informed of the survey.*** This is done via a letter sent to parents. The letter should be delivered however the school normally communicates with parents about important items. **The letter must include an email address of a designated individual from the school that parents will contact if they do not want their child(ren) to participate.**
2. ***Making students aware that their participation is voluntary.*** If no email is received by the school, then the student will be asked to participate in the survey. The instructions that are read aloud to students by their teachers, as well as the instructions on the survey website, will make it clear to students that their participation is voluntary. An individual student may decide not to take the survey, with no negative consequences, even if their parent/guardian does not object to their participation.

Letter Content

A parent letter template is provided that you must use for your own district/school letter. Please put the letter on your school letterhead. This letter was approved by EDC's Institutional Review Board and cannot be modified, except for the areas highlighted for school customization. This ensures that your letter will cover the following key components:

1. An overview of the purpose of the study and types of information collected
2. A description of what participation entails
3. Statements about the **anonymous** and **voluntary** nature of the survey
4. An explanation of the *Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment*
5. Information on where and when a parent/guardian can view a copy of the survey if they wish to do so before making a decision (**please allow for at least 3-5 days for parents to come in and view the survey**)
6. An email address of a designated individual from the school for parents/guardians to contact if they do NOT permit their child to participate

Please determine in advance who will write and sign the letter (usually the school principal), what method you will use to deliver it to parents, and who will be the contact for parents who have questions or who do not want their child(ren) to participate.

Procedures and Timeline for Parent/Guardian Permission

- ◆ Using the template, customize your parent letter and email it to Ramya Kumar at rkumar@edc.org for approval **at least one week prior to the time you plan to deliver the letter to parents**. This will provide us with a copy we need to keep on file and also allow us to ensure that no key components are missing. We will respond to you within 2-4 days to approve your letter or to request any changes/clarifications.
- ◆ We will provide you with Spanish and Portuguese copies of the parent/guardian permission letter template. Your district is responsible for customizing these translations as needed, once your English letter is finalized and approved by EDC.
- ◆ Letters to parents/guardians should be delivered approximately **1-2 weeks** prior to the scheduled survey administration date using your school's normal means of parent communication.
- ◆ You should have a copy of the survey available in a predetermined location should any parents/guardians wish to view it before making a decision (**please allow for at least 3-5 days for parents to come in and view the survey**). We will make sure to get you a copy of your survey once we have received your parent letter and know when it will be sent out.

IMPORTANT! If a parent/guardian wishes to view the survey, they must come to the school to view a copy. Under no circumstances should you email the survey to a parent, mail them a copy, allow them to take home a printed copy, or allow them to take photos of the survey. This is to avoid parents discussing the survey with their child(ren) prior to the survey date, which could influence how their children respond. This is a normal procedure in survey research not to circulate copies of a survey prior to data collection. If a parent cannot come to the school to view the survey, then let them know they can simply choose opt out their child. If they continue to express concerns, you may direct them to the MWAHS Project Director, Shari Kessel Schneider, at skschneider@edc.org.

- ◆ Your school must have a method for keeping track of the students who are denied permission to participate, and informing teachers so those students are not given surveys. Please be sure to inform substitute teachers as well.
- ◆ Please keep track of the total number of students at your school who do not receive parent permission, and the number of students by grade who do not receive parent permission. You will be asked to provide these numbers on the School Participation Form.
- ◆ Nonparticipating students should be allowed to read/study quietly during the scheduled survey time.

If you have any questions about the parent/guardian permission process, please contact Shari Kessel Schneider, MWAHS Project Director, at 617-618-2177 or skschneider@edc.org.

2023 MWAHS PARENT LETTER TEMPLATE **(highlighted areas to be customized for each school)**

[Place on School/Department Letterhead]

[Date]

Dear Parent or Guardian,

To make sure we give the best possible education and services to children in [name of town], we want to learn about their attitudes and behaviors with regard to a variety of health issues. In order to accomplish this, students attending [name of school] are being asked to participate in a survey called the *MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey*. [name of school] has been participating in this survey since [year]. The questions on the survey cover many topics including alcohol, tobacco and other drug use; violence and safety; nutrition and physical activity; sexual behaviors [omit "sexual behaviors" at the middle school level if your district did not choose to include these optional questions]; online behaviors; and mental health. This project will help our district develop and enhance its health education and prevention programs. We will be giving this online survey to students in grades [grades] on [date(s)].

The survey is **anonymous**, meaning your child will not be asked to provide their name, and no one will know how they respond. There will be no identifying information collected on the survey, and there will be no way to link your child's responses to their identity.

Completing this survey is **voluntary**. Your child's grades in school will not be affected by whether or not they participate. Your child can also decide not to take the survey or skip any question they don't wish to answer.

The *Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment* is a Federal Law that requires us to notify you ahead of time about the survey, and give you the chance to look at it, so you can let us know if you don't want your child to take part. If you want to see the survey before deciding, a copy will be available at [physical location at school] from [dates/times available].

If you DO NOT want your child to take part in the survey, please email [Name of designated individual] at [email address] by [date].

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact [contact person title and name] at [contact person phone number and/or email].

Sincerely,

[Principal Name and Signature]