

**ONLINE DANE COUNTY YOUTH ASSESSMENT (DCYA)**  
**Parent and Student Information**

Q: What is the DCYA?

A: Since 1980, the Dane County Youth Commission has coordinated a survey of middle and high school youth throughout Dane county to collect data on health, mental health, social and behavioral trends. Project partners include the United Way of Dane County, Public Health of Madison & Dane County, the Dane County Department of Human Services, the City of Madison & Dane County school districts.

Q: Why is this survey being done?

A: DCYA captures “youth voice” and provides a comprehensive picture of the needs and interests of Dane county youth that subsequently informs resource allocation, program development, policy making and grant applications.

Q: What does DCYA measure?

A: Over 23,000 middle and high school youth complete the survey providing valuable information about their experiences at home, in school and in their communities. Survey topics include alcohol/drug use, level of school engagement, use of free time, health and nutrition, work and volunteer time, family relationships, youth assets and risk behaviors.

Q: Will student participation be anonymous?

A: Yes. Survey administration procedures have been designed to protect student privacy and allow for anonymous participation. Students will not put their names or other identifying information on the survey. The 2021 survey will be administered through virtual classrooms and takes into account additional security precautions to ensure student confidence and privacy.

Q: Does my child have to participate?

A: No. Participation in the DCYA is voluntary. Students also have the option of leaving a question blank that they are not comfortable answering.

Q: How are parents notified about the DCYA?

A: School districts notify parents 30 days prior to administration via “passive consent” using phone calls, letters, e-mail or other correspondence typically used to communicate with parents. Surveys administered in Wisconsin, such as the DCYA, are voluntary. Because students are instructed about it being voluntary, passive parental permission is allowable. “Passive” means the parent is provided an opportunity to “opt out” or remove their child from participation. The district assumes parental consent if they hear no timely objection from the parent. School districts follow all student privacy laws.

- Q: How was my child selected to participate in the survey?  
A: Students in participating districts all partake in the survey. Given its size, the Madison Metropolitan School District conducts a process to select a representative sample of the student body.
- Q: How long does it take to fill out the survey? Does the survey include a physical test?  
A: It takes about 20-25 minutes for middle school youth to fill out the web-based survey. The high school survey takes 30 – 35 minutes to complete. The survey does not include a physical test or exam.
- Q: Doesn't a survey like this actually encourage students to engage in risk behaviors?  
A: The causes and determinants of health-related behaviors are very complex. Students are exposed frequently to information about tobacco, alcohol, other drug use, violence and sexuality through the media, parents, friends, and the broader community. Exposure to a small number of questions on any one topic is not likely to cause a change in behavior, either good or bad. If it were that easy, we could simply ask students about all the things we want them to do!
- Q: Do students answer questions truthfully?  
A: Research indicates data of this nature may be gathered as reliably from adolescents as from adults. To obtain truthful answers, students must perceive the survey as important and know that procedures have been developed to protect their privacy and allow for anonymous participation. The importance of the information gathered is carefully explained to students at the beginning of the DCYA.
- Q: Can I review a copy of the survey?  
A: Yes, a copy of the survey may be requested. To ensure the validity of the survey results, we ask that you not share the content or engage in a discussion with your child prior to district survey administration.
- Q: What will be done with the results?  
A: A report summarizing student responses to each DCYA item will be prepared and published on the Dane County Human Services web site. Researchers and community stakeholders use the data to make programming, policy and grant-writing decisions. Remember, no child will ever be mentioned by name.
- Q: Whom can I contact if I have questions about the survey?  
A: Megan Benson, Youth Commission Chair [meghan.benson@ppwi.org](mailto:meghan.benson@ppwi.org)  
Brian Koenig, K12 Associates, project vendor [bwkoenig@k12associates.com](mailto:bwkoenig@k12associates.com)  
Connie Bettin, Youth Commission staff [bettin@countyofdane.com](mailto:bettin@countyofdane.com)

