

# Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Created 2025  
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Updated  
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A guide for  
Wilmington  
caregivers, students,  
and faculty

# The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

Developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1990

Created to “monitor priority health risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death, disease, injury, and social problems among youth”\*

Completely anonymous and optional (the survey itself is optional, as is every question)

Compares the data within the district and surrounding districts

\*According to the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

# History of the YRBS in Wilmington

Started in 2015 at the request of the Coordinator for Health Services and the director of the Office of Student Support Services

In 2017, a joint contract between John Snow Inc. (JSI) and ten of the twelve schools in the Middlesex Valley League was negotiated (including Wilmington)

In the fall after every administration of the survey, JSI analyzes the data and compiles a presentation for the School Committee

The money to administer the survey is from a state grant entitled Comprehensive School Health Service

# The YRBS Today in Wilmington

Conducted in partnership with Arlington, Belmont, Burlington, Melrose, Stoneham, Wakefield, Watertown, Winchester, and Woburn

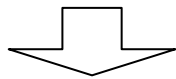
Handpicked questions from the larger pool by the Health and Wellness Advisory Committee to best suit the district's needs

Administered every two years to 6th-12th grade (questions adjusted to suit grade level)

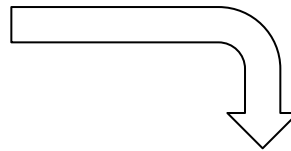
MA randomly selects public high schools every two years for the survey, but the Middlesex League chooses to voluntarily conduct the YRBS

# The Path of the Survey Questions Flowchart

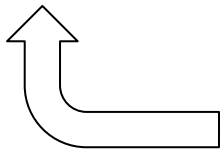
The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) creates the question pool



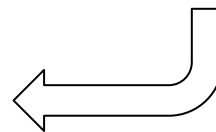
John Snow Inc. (JSI) compiles the questions per the requests of the Middlesex Valley League districts



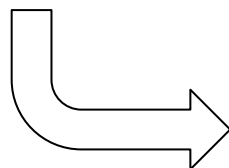
Middlesex Valley League acts as the go-between for its participating districts and JSI (Burlington Public Schools holds the actual contract)



Wilmington receives its personalized survey and administers it to 6th-12th grade students



JSI analyzes the results and compiles a report based on district data and data from across the Middlesex Valley League



The Wilmington School Committee receives this report and decides upon courses of action based on the data



# Content Within the YRBS

- \* Student Characteristics
- \* Assets and Protective Factors
- \* Discrimination
- \* Safety
- \* Violence-Related Behaviors and Experiences
- \* Bullying
- \* Mental Health
- \* Alcohol Use
- \* Electronic Vapor Product Use
- \* Marijuana/Tobacco/Prescription Drug Use
- \* Perceptions of Substance Use
- \* Sexual Behaviors
- \* Nutrition
- \* Physical Activity
- \* Organized Activities
- \* Other Topics

[2023 Middle School Survey](#)

[2023 High School Survey](#)

HS has more questions than MS and 6th grade does not have the Sexual Behaviors section.

# Applications of the Data from the YRBS

Specific trends from the survey have been and continue to be noted then used when applying for grants to support appropriate programming and resources.

After the results of the 2019 YRBS survey, the School Committee decided to take action against the rising statistics of students vaping. [Read the Wilmington Apple article](#)

Previously, a mandatory “pre-prom” meeting for students and parents was held with a guest speaker that focused on the dangers of driving under the influence. This speaker was paid from the same grant as the YRBS, and the data from this survey continues to offer insight on this issue.

[Middlesex Valley League Data  
Compilation \(2023\)](#)

# “Why Take the YRBS” - The School Committee Perspective

“If we have an epidemic of bullying of a certain group of religious students, we need to know that... Folks can hold us accountable with the data that we report.”  
-- Mr. Nicholas Golden

“If there is concerning behavior amongst our youth that come to our schools each and every day, we are going to do our best to try and improve upon that, while still focusing on teaching and learning.”  
--Dr. Glenn Brand

“The value is almost infinite to learn about a spike in alcohol and/or unsafe driving off this survey than from the police... when you see unsafe behavior on the side of the road, it’s too late. This is an opportunity to get really powerful information early.” -- Mr. Stephen Turner

# **“Why” - The District Coordinator of Nursing Services Perspective**

“When we have done professional development in the beginning of the school year, we have brought in speakers from the DESE SAFE program to help our teachers have more skills and knowledge on how to support our students. We look at the data critically, and when there are spikes, especially when we look at Wilmington data then we look at Middlesex data, we meet and decide if we need to put additional resources into programs to help support whatever we’re seeing, whether it’s vaping, or alcohol use, or anything else.”

-- Ms. Rebecca Brown

# “Why” - The Caregiver Perspective

“I want my student to take the Youth Risk Behavior Survey to help enhance the anti-bullying programs in Wilmington Schools, as well as other programs that are necessary for the students’ health and well-being” -- A Wilmington Caregiver

“I definitely see the value in administering this survey to identify concerning trends, allowing our district to address the students’ needs proactively. As a parent, I have made the effort to review the survey results every year since my children entered middle school. It has prompted some good family discussions in our household, as I often times seek my kids’ perspectives on some of the topics where I’ve been surprised by the results, particularly regarding the mental health of our students.” -- A Wilmington Caregiver

# Common Questions About the YRBS

Q: Are all questions mandatory?

A: No. In addition to the survey itself being optional, no questions are required. The student may choose to answer as many or few questions as they desire.

Q: Are students likely to perform behaviors they read about on the survey?

A: No. Research has indicated this is not a likely possibility.

Q: Will students actually tell the truth due the anonymity?

A: Research suggests yes. In addition, JSI performs data cleaning to ensure the data they report is as accurate as possible.

Q: How I can find out more information?

A: The YRBS page on the school website may be helpful. In addition, you can contact Erin Dunham ([erin.dunham@wpsk12.com](mailto:erin.dunham@wpsk12.com)), Coordinator of Behavioral Health and Social Emotional Support

# Opting Out of the YRBS

The ability to opt a student out of a survey is required by the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment.

To opt out of the YRBS, please visit the Wilmington Public Schools website for instructions.

## A Personal Note From the Author

“I knew barely anything about this survey before we started this project, aside from the fact that I had taken it before. Once we began researching this topic I realized how important this survey is for not only the Wilmington community but communities all over the country. This survey allows schools to implement programs for the specific needs of their students, to help them face problems they may be dealing with. I hope that this survey continues to create programs that are beneficial to students and that it continues to help students in the future.” -- Julia Moriarty, junior at WHS

# A Personal Note From the Author

“I was fairly unaware of this survey when we started this project. I knew it existed and that I had probably taken it, but I did not know why, where it came from, or how it would benefit myself and my community. After attending a Health and Wellness Advisory Council meeting, I realized this survey has the potential to bring about real, positive change. A significant issue I noticed was a lack of clear communication on all fronts, inhibiting the power of the survey. My aim is to start to fill these gaps to promote understanding, establish a precedent for better communication, and improve the data collected from the survey to better serve my community. I truly believe that the YRBS can bring awareness to issues my peers and I are facing, which in turn will spark the conversation of how to resolve these issues. I intend on continuing to offer my input and advice as the student representative to the Health and Wellness Advisory Council next year to best utilize any knowledge gleaned from the YRBS to make my school and town a safer, healthier, and happier place.” -- Allison Hall, junior at WHS