

## **2021 MIDDLESEX LEAGUE YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY FACT SHEET**

### **What is the YRBS?**

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was developed by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1990 to monitor health behaviors that contribute markedly to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and young adults in the United States. The YRBS is administered every two years in select school districts in 46 states. It has been administered in Wilmington Public Schools since 2015. These behaviors, often established during childhood and early adolescence, include:

- Behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence
- Physical activity
- Nutrition
- Weight status
- Tobacco use
- Alcohol and other drug use
- Sexual behaviors

Questions are added, removed, and updated in reaction to emerging health trends. The survey is part of a larger effort to help communities increase the resiliency of young people by reducing high risk behaviors and promoting healthy behaviors. Responses are collected every two years from high school and middle school students.

### **Why are we administering the survey as part of the Middlesex League?**

Since 2017, Middlesex League school districts have collaboratively administered the YRBS. This allows participating school districts and the region overall to better understand and respond to the health risks facing youth in their communities, as well as to promote information sharing and coordination across the school districts, health officials, and other community-based service providers. The CDC YRBS administration does not allow any changes to survey questions, only surveys select students in a district (not all eligible students), and does not provide data on a school district or regional level.

### **Who is eligible for the YRBS?**

All students in grades 6 through 12 are eligible to participate. Parents can opt their child out of taking the survey and students can, similarly, choose not to participate.

### **Is the YRBS anonymous?**

Yes, student participation in the YRBS is both anonymous and voluntary. The surveys are completed using a generic link and no identifying information is collected.

### **How is YRBS data disseminated?**

Reports are created for each Middlesex League school district, as well as a regional report. Wilmington Public Schools will share the results with families, post them on the WPS website, and present results during a school committee meeting.

### **How are YRBS data used?**

The YRBS is considered the primary source for comprehensive data on school-aged youth and young adult health practices and health risk behaviors. State governments, local communities, and public health organizations use YRBS data to set and track progress toward meeting school health and health promotion program goals, support modification of school health curricula or other programs, support new legislation and policies that promote health, and seek funding and other support for new initiatives.

CDC and other federal agencies routinely use YRBS data to assess trends in priority health behaviors among high school students, monitor progress toward achieving national health objectives, and evaluate the contribution of broad prevention efforts in schools and other settings toward helping the nation reduce health risk behaviors among youth.

### **Will this survey cause students to initiate or increase high-risk behaviors?**

There is no evidence that simply asking students about health behaviors will encourage them to try that behavior. The causes and determinants of health risk behaviors are very complex. Students receive regular exposure to information about tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use; violence; and sexuality through their school curricula, the media, parents, friends, and community organizations. Exposure to a small number of questions on any one topic is not likely to cause a significant change in behavior—either good or bad.

### **Do students answer the questions truthfully?**

Research indicates data of this nature may be gathered as reliably from adolescents as from adults. JSI follows the MA Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data cleaning methods when processing YRBS data to help identify the small percentage of students who falsify their answers. 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.

### **Who is JSI?**

JSI has been subcontracted by the Middlesex League since 2017 to facilitate the administration of the YRBS, analyze the results, and create district and regional reports. JSI is a health care research and consulting organization committed to improving the health of individuals and communities worldwide. Its fundamental goal is to ensure that all individuals can live their best and healthiest life, regardless of age or circumstances. In pursuit of our goal, JSI provides innovative management consulting and technical assistance incorporating a broad range of skills. Founded in 1978, they collaborate with government agencies, the private sector, and local nonprofit and civil society organizations to identify and implement solutions to public health challenges. These partnerships improve the quality, accessibility, and equity of health systems and lead to better health outcomes.