Shelby County Schools (SCS) conducts a biennial school-based survey to measure the prevalence of priority health risk behaviors among students in grades 6 through 12. This Q&A provides answers to important questions about the YRBS.

Q. **What is the focus of the YRBS?**

A. The YRBS focuses on priority risk behaviors established during youth that result in the most significant mortality and morbidity during both youth and adulthood. These include: behaviors that result in unintentional injuries and violence; tobacco use; alcohol and other drug use; sexual behaviors that contribute to HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and unintended pregnancies; unhealthy dietary behaviors; and physical inactivity. In addition, the YRBS also assesses the prevalence of obesity and asthma.

Q. **Why is the YRBS conducted?**

A. Shelby County Schools is responsible for identifying and monitoring factors that may affect the health of our youth. SCS will use the results from the YRBS to (1) monitor how priority health risk behaviors among middle and high school students increase, decrease, or remain the same over time; (2) evaluate the impact of broad national, state, and local efforts to prevent risk behaviors; and (3) improve school health education policies and programs.

Q. **Does the survey have broad support?**

A. Yes. The survey is supported by many major national organizations interested in the health of youth. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Association of School Administrators, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National Association/Health Information Network, the National PTA, the National School Boards Association, and the Society of State Directors of Health, Physical Education and Recreation have provided letters of support. At the state level, the Tennessee Department of Education supports our YRBS.

Q. **Are sensitive questions asked?**

A. Questions regarding sexual intercourse and injection drug use may be considered sensitive by some schools. However, AIDS, HIV infection, and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are major health problems, and sexual intercourse and injection drug use are among the behaviors known to increase the risk of HIV or other STDs. The only way to determine if adolescents are at risk of becoming infected with HIV or other STDs is to ask questions about these behaviors. Other topic areas that may be considered sensitive are attempted suicide, sexual behavior, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, and weapon-carrying. The questions are asked in a straightforward manner and the YRBS is administered under conditions that are designed to protect student anonymity, thus reducing any uneasiness about answering questions considered sensitive. Also, if students are not comfortable answering a question, they may leave it blank.

Q. **Are students tracked over time to see how their behavior changes?**

A. Students who take part in the survey one year cannot be tracked because no identifying information is collected. Each administration year a new sample of students is drawn.
Q. Is student participation anonymous? How is student privacy protected?

A. Survey administration procedures are designed to protect student privacy by allowing for anonymous and voluntary participation. Students complete the self-administered questionnaire by recording their responses directly in an answer sheet containing no personal identifiers. To the extent possible, students’ desks are spread throughout the classroom to minimize the chance that students will see each other’s responses. Students are also encouraged to use an extra sheet of paper provided by the survey administrator to cover their responses as they complete the questionnaire. Students not participating in the survey are provided with an alternative activity by their school. Published reports do not include names of schools or students.

Q. Which SCS schools and students will take part in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)?

A. The YRBS will be administered in SCS regular and alternative middle and high schools. Depending on the size of the school, 1-5 classes from each school are randomly selected to participate in the survey. Approximately 4600 students in grades 6-12 will be randomly selected to take part. Active parental consent will be obtained, and there will be no penalties for students who decline to participate.

Q. What if schools or students do not choose to participate?

A. Participation in the YRBS is voluntary. However, to develop accurate estimates of priority health risk behaviors among adolescents in Shelby County Schools, participation rates must be high. Selected schools and students cannot be replaced. The goal is to achieve 90 to 95 percent participation by selected schools and students. In 2013, 100% of alternative and regular, middle and high schools participated.

Q. How is the YRBS coordinated at each school?

A. It is preferable to have a single coordinator at each school. This can be the principal, another administrator, a teacher, or someone else designated by the principal. The coordinator provides a list of class sections, distributes active parental permission forms to teachers of the sampled classes, helps to promote the survey in the school, and ensures a high participation rate.

Q. How long does it take to fill out the survey?

A. One class period is needed for administration of the self-administered questionnaire. It takes approximately 10 minutes for the survey administrator to distribute survey materials and read directions to the students. It then takes approximately 40 minutes for students to record their responses. The middle school questionnaire contains 66 multiple choice questions, and the high school questionnaire contains 99 multiple choice questions. No physical test or exam is involved.

Q. Do students answer questions truthfully?

A. Research indicates data of this nature may be gathered as reliably from adolescents as from adults. Internal reliability checks help to identify the small percentage of students who falsify their answers. To obtain truthful answers, students must perceive the survey as important and know procedures have been developed to protect their privacy and allow for anonymous participation.

Q. Whom do I contact for additional information?

A. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Grant and the YRBS survey is administered through the SCS Department of Coordinated School Health. Please contact Diane McGarry, Research Analyst, at 473-2769 or mcgarryd@scsk12.org for more information about the YRBS.