

October 7, 2024

Dear Parent or Guardian of Student in Grades 8, 10, or 12:

The Fairfax County Youth Survey, a collaboration between the Fairfax County School Board and the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, is a comprehensive, anonymous, and voluntary survey given each year to students in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12. The survey examines behaviors, experiences, and other factors that influence the health and well-being of Fairfax County's youth. The results, published each year at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/youthsurvey>, identify trends and areas of need, providing a snapshot of the county's youth and serving as a barometer of the community's effectiveness in fostering healthy choices in young people.

Fairfax County Public Schools has been administering the Youth Survey since 2001, with the sixth-grade survey developed for administration in 2008. The majority of the questions currently on the survey were selected from nationally recognized surveys, including the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey through the National Institute of Health. Millions of students across the country have taken these surveys since YRBSS began surveying youth in 1991 and MTF began in 1975. Using questions from these national surveys helps to ensure that the county has national comparisons to use as a benchmark. It also ensures that the questions measure what they are intended to measure, as the questions meet scientific standards of reliability and validity. Mechanisms are also incorporated to detect invalid responses to survey questions and several internal reliability checks help identify falsified answers.

The Youth Survey is conducted electronically during school hours, during one class period, and is offered in eight languages. It is completely anonymous, and responses cannot be traced back to your child's personal information or linked to a computer, e-mail address, or other electronic identifiers. No personally identifiable information or IP addresses are recorded. Survey responses are stored in a secure server which is compliant with federal data security standards.

To further protect students' anonymity, the responses are read and analyzed only by the researchers and summarized in a report with no personal identifiers. All results are presented at a group, or aggregate, level.

The Fairfax County Youth Survey asks questions about risky behavior, mental health, physical health, and safety, including questions about drug use, bullying, and depression. Students are also asked about the positive aspects of their lives and activities, as well as specific protective factors concerning health and safety, including participating in extracurricular activities. Building protective factors can help young people be more resilient.

Some questions that may be considered sensitive, such as questions regarding suicide, sexual behavior, and transgender status, are included in recognition of the importance of these topics and are presented in a straightforward and sensitive manner. These questions are asked ONLY of students in eighth, tenth, and twelfth grade, as sixth-grade students take a shortened,

modified survey. In addition, there is no evidence that asking students about health risk behaviors will encourage them to attempt those behaviors. In fact, there are studies that provide evidence that asking sensitive questions such as these may actually reduce the likelihood of engaging in these behaviors.

County, school, and community-based organizations rely on the Youth Survey results to assess youth needs and strengths, develop programs, monitor trends, measure countywide outcomes, and guide countywide planning of prevention efforts. The survey is also an important tool for measuring student achievement goals related to essential life skills and responsibility to the community. Most importantly, the survey gives parents, youth, and community members a sense of our challenges and our strengths and how to build upon those strengths.

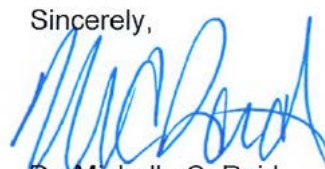
You have the right to preview the survey and may deny permission for your child to participate, if you desire. If you choose not to have your child participate, your child will be assigned an alternative activity during the survey administration. Additionally, if at any time a student is uncomfortable with any question on the survey, the student may skip that question or may elect to discontinue the survey entirely.

The survey will be administered between November 12 and November 22, 2024, during a time of day determined by your child's school administration. A copy of the survey will be available to parents and/or guardians online at <https://www.fcps.edu/resources/student-safety-andwellness/youth-survey> October 11, 2024.

While it is our hope that as many students as possible will participate, if you do not wish for your child to take part in the Youth Survey, please complete the form attached below and return it to your child's school counselor no later than November 8, 2024. If you have already opted your child out of this survey using the [Parental Digital Consent Portal](#) you do not need to complete the attached form.

If you have questions about the Youth Survey, please contact Bethany Demers, Student Mental Health Specialist, at 571-423-4878.



Sincerely,  
  
Dr. Michelle C. Reid  
Superintendent of Schools

MCR/bd  
Attachment

**2024 Fairfax County Youth Survey**

**OPT-OUT FORM**

Complete this form **only** if you **do not** wish for your child to participate in the survey. Return it to your child's school counselor no later than November 8, 2024. If you have already opted your child out using the [Parental Digital Consent Portal](#) you do not need to complete this form.

**I do not give permission** for my child to participate in the confidential *2024 Fairfax County Youth Survey*. I understand that my child will be assigned to an alternative activity during the administration of the survey.

Student's Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Student ID #: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent or Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_