



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of Health

DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Director's Office

Anchorage
3601 C Street, Suite 756
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-5924
Main: 907.269.8126
Fax: 907.269.2048

July 29, 2022

Dear Alaska YRBS Partners,

Good news! After being canceled in 2021, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) will be returning to Alaska high schools this coming school year.

While the first day of school is still several weeks away, we're writing now to ask for your support and participation in developing the survey. You can participate in this process by proposing new questions and attending a questionnaire development meeting that will be held later this summer. Developing a successful survey requires participation by diverse partners and months of preparation.

Part of our planning this year has included the difficult decision to not include questions on sexual orientation and gender identity in the 2023 survey. The 2021 survey was skipped because of the stress schools were experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also in part because of concerns the Alaska Division of Public Health (DPH) received from some school districts regarding the survey content.

Having missed the opportunity to collect data on the health of Alaska high school students in 2021, it is more important than ever to have a successful YRBS in 2023, which means full participation from districts statewide. We understand the value of including questions on sexual orientation and gender identity, but believe it would be in the survey's best interests to omit these questions in 2023. This decision is just about this year's survey and does not reflect a formal permanent change for future years.

Alaska students take the YRBS every other year in odd-numbered years in public traditional and alternative high schools. Student participation is anonymous, voluntary, and requires written parental consent.

As you know, the YRBS survey provides key data that informs multiple health improvement efforts including Alaska's health improvement plan (Healthy Alaskans 2030), the Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Plan and a wide variety of programs from organizations statewide that strive to understand and meet the needs of Alaska teens. The YRBS data are critical in shaping these programs and we cannot afford to miss another year.

We hope you will join us in this year's planning process. We'll be sharing more information soon. In the meantime, please enjoy your summer.

Best wishes,

Alaska Division of Public Health
Department of Health