

## Encouraging School Cooperation

**Q: Will participation in the Youth Tobacco Survey take up instructional time in the classroom?**

A: Yes - the survey takes class time, BUT there are several things that can help to “soften” this idea:

1. *Not all classes will be selected for participation.* The sampling designs set up for most states averages out to 2-5 classes per school being selected for survey participation.
2. *While the survey does require class time, only one class period is needed to conduct it.* No classes or students will be asked to complete a survey that takes longer than an average class period to complete. Also, most students do not need the entire period to finish the survey
3. *It is possible to use an alternative class list arrangement from which classes will be selected for participation that meets both the school’s and local/state needs.* If the school administrator’s concern is that “higher-priority” classes (e.g., math, science, English) would be disrupted by the survey, offering these alternatives may help. They include offering that, if certain criteria are met, the school *may* be able to identify specific, “lower-priority” classes from which we would then randomly select so that none of their “higher-priority” classes are selected. This is rather than the typical arrangement where a school simply provides us with a list of second period classes from which we would randomly select, potentially leading to the selection of the very “high-priority” classes the school is trying to avoid. Some examples of what may be considered “lower-priority”:
  - Homeroom classes (*Caution:* these periods may be much shorter and therefore more difficult to complete the survey in, and thus should be a last resort. However it’s better to agree to homeroom than lose the school altogether)
  - Gym classes
  - Health classes
  - Study halls
  - Some combination of the above

The only requirement in using this type of alternate arrangement is that *every student* is enrolled in the class, or combination of classes, this semester, and that there is no student “overlap” (i.e. the student is taking 2 gym classes and thus may be selected twice).

Another potential problem with having schools pick the classes to be surveyed would be the concern regarding under-representation. This sometimes occurs when the school would like you to randomly select from specific (i.e. “hand picked”) classes but not all of the student body is currently enrolled in the class type selected (health classes as an example).

In the end it is still better to have the school pick the type of classes to be surveyed as opposed to losing the entire school. However, care should be given to ensure that the classes selected include as much of the student body as possible.

If the school will not work with you to achieve an alternate arrangement as described in item 3 above, or such an arrangement is not feasible, we can respectfully ask the school to allow us to do the class selection (using the standard second period class list), and then let them make their decision. If the administrator still expresses concerns, or thinks that creating a schedule that will work will be too much trouble, we can offer to do the class selection and *then* see which classes are selected before they make their decision. For example, if a school provides a 2<sup>nd</sup> period class list and the random class selection indicates that 2 gym classes were selected, a principal might be encouraged to participate. If one of the classes is Math however, and the principal will only allow us to survey the gym class, we would survey the gym class and take a loss on the other.

The idea is to get the school to participate, and if necessary, take the loss in participation rates at the *classroom level*.

If the superintendent or school board office is the party refusing and they are still refusing then respectfully ask if they would allow us to contact the principal directly to talk with them to request their support.

**Q: Can principals review answer sheets?**

A: No, however some additional information follows:

1. *The answer sheets alone would not be able to answer any questions or provide any results.* The questions are not included with the answer sheets (like with some other surveys where respondents would answer directly in the question booklet), so, for example, there are no identifiers that would indicate what an answer marked “A” represents.
2. *School level reports would provide only limited information.* The principal or school administrator may be interested in reviewing answer sheets in order to gauge prevalence or other indicators at the school. While CDC recommends against providing school level data, if it is a matter of providing that information or losing school participation; a compromise may be possible. Also note that CDC cannot generate such a “school level” report. However, CDC does provide the state with the data file and it is then up to the state to fill this request. If applicable to your situation, please contact an OSH representative for more details on this matter.
3. In discussion with the school administrator, there are several things we may want to point out:
  - While we know that schools would be unable to gather any meaningful information from the answer sheets alone, allowing anyone to review the answer sheets threatens the students’ anonymity and can generate distrust.

- While a school-specific report can be provided, there's no guarantee that the report will provide the kind of information that the school is looking for. This point should be clearly conveyed to the school.
- The selection of students is part of a larger sampling plan designed to yield estimates that are representative of the STATE overall. Thus, unless a school surveyed ALL students in their school, a school level report would not actually be representative of their school, but rather would only represent those students who took the survey. This in and of itself is a concern regarding school level reporting.

In the end if it is critical to provide school specific data to maintain the relationship with the school and gain participation, we *can* provide it. When determining if it's necessary, take into consideration not only whether it's needed to gain participation as but also consider the current status of your school response rate(s). This early in the process it's very hard to tell how big or small the impact of a non-participating school or district may be, so you may want to play it more conservatively and go to the school-specific report option sooner rather than later. But further down the road, should you know you already have a very strong school response rate, then you may have more leeway to consider a school or schools non-participating rather than offering school level reports. And just one more thing to throw in the mix--while it may be true that you have more leeway to say no later in the process, there may be political/relationship implications if a school or district was to find out you would not give them school reports but you gave them to somebody else.

- Below is a continuum of details, from more to less desirable, regarding what we can offer the school or district when conceding to provide school level reports.
  - When CDC provides the state level reports to the state, each table will be broken down by grade, sex, and race. First and foremost, if you have to agree to any kind of school specific report, the ideal would be omit and demographic identifiers from the analysis. To do otherwise at the school level could lead to deductive disclosure of which students may have participated, or even how specific students may have responded to specific question, especially when dealing with small cell sizes.
  - In the case of South Bend School District, they have two middle schools and four high schools that were selected. Would they be satisfied receiving an overall report for all selected middle schools and an overall report for all selected high schools in their district rather than for each individual school? Size and make-up of the student population at these schools should still be considered to determine whether removal of demographic identifiers would be advised.
  - If an overall report is not acceptable, the next best thing would be individual yet OVERALL school reports—e.g., each school gets an individualized report, but with NO demographic breakdown within the tables.
  - If none of the above works, the state can run and provide school level reports with demographic identifiers, keeping in mind the considerations and implications previously discussed.