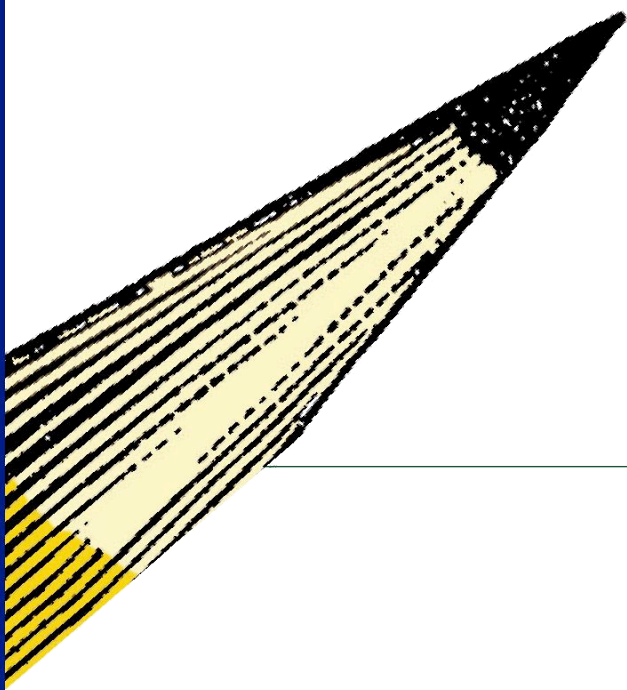


GUIDEBOOK TO THE CALIFORNIA SCHOOL CLIMATE,
HEALTH, & LEARNING SURVEYS
2016-17 Edition



The California Healthy Kids Survey—along with the California School Staff Survey and the California School Parent Survey—is part of the comprehensive Cal-SCHLS data system, developed for the California Department of Education.



school climate, health & learning
CALIFORNIA SURVEY SYSTEM



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PURPOSE OF THE GUIDEBOOK

This guidebook is designed to ensure that the administration process of the student, staff, and parent surveys is as efficient and problem free as possible. The California School Climate, Healthy, and Learning Surveys (Cal-SCHLS) encompass three individual surveys known as the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), the California School Staff Survey (CSSS) for staff, and the California School Parent Survey (CSPS). Every effort has been made to minimize local survey responsibilities and costs, but there are still steps and details involved in successfully conducting the survey. Step-by-step, this guidebook describes the tasks that need to be performed and offers strategies to help you along the way. There are two sections:

- » The first section lists common tasks necessary for all three surveys.
- » The second section presents detailed tasks for the student survey, the most complex, including sampling, parent consent, etc.

In the Appendix is a Survey Planning Checklist that lists all common steps.

TASK 1: CONTACT A SURVEY TECHNICAL ADVISOR PROVIDER

The first task is to contact one of the Technical Advisors to discuss your survey options and begin the planning and scheduling process. Calling 1-888-841-7536 can access the Cal-SCHLS Regional Technical Assistance Center. In addition, information and surveys are available at cal-schls.wested.org from which you can access individual survey websites.

TASK 2: IDENTIFY COUNTY AND/OR DISTRICT SURVEY COORDINATOR

Identify a County and/or District Coordinator who will be responsible for planning and administering the CAL-SCHLS at all participating schools in the district. It is essential for the Coordinator to regularly monitor and make frequent follow-up calls to check on the status of each task at each school, and to stay in contact with Technical Advisors. Checklists for survey tasks, along with a timeline, are provided in the Appendix. Each task on this checklist corresponds to the common survey tasks listed in the remainder of this guidebook.

TASK 3: OBTAIN SUPERINTENDENT AND SCHOOL BOARD APPROVAL

In most districts, the surveys will require authorization from the district superintendent and/or the school board. Even if this is not required, keep them informed about the surveys and obtain their support—they are often the people who will receive calls from parents and reporters. A letter of support from the superintendent is useful for encouraging principal, school staff, and parent participation. In particular, this group of people will need to know the survey content (i.e., sensitive questions), procedures for protecting parents' and pupils' rights (including a draft parent consent form), and the costs to the district. The Frequently Asked Questions, available online at chks.wested.org, may help you respond to their likely concerns.

In addition to superintendent and School Board approval, check to see if you need survey approval from an Institutional Review Board.

TASK 4: FORM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

An advisory committee of influential school and community leaders can be a tremendous advantage in planning and conducting the surveys, and in determining how to address the needs that are identified. It may be especially valuable in addressing local concerns that need to be taken into consideration.

The basis for such a group should already exist. Make sure there is broad representation from stakeholders such as the following:

- » Students, teachers, principals, School Site Council members, and other individuals who will be involved in the survey process;
- » School board members and the district superintendent;
- » Key district administrators, such as the Title I or other categorical program directors, the director of curriculum and instruction, and the director of pupil support;
- » Parents and key religious, medical, and business leaders, law enforcement, and elected public officials.

TASK 5: DETERMINE GOALS AND DATA NEEDS

All three surveys are designed to be responsive to local needs and standards. Work with your advisory committee and superintendent to identify the main survey objectives and potential data uses, as well as local concerns and issues that need to be taken into consideration.

You don't have to have immediate answers for every question, issue, or problem surrounding the surveys that emerges at this time. But you do need to start thinking about them and formulate tentative answers or recommendations that you can present to stakeholders and survey participants.

Among the questions you should discuss are:

- » Since you have the option of including your own, custom, local questions, discuss whether your district may want to add them.
- » Whether you have school-specific data needs
- » What stakeholders you need to involve in survey planning
- » Who should be asked to take the surveys beyond the minimum requirement
- » Tentative administration dates

TASK 6: SELECT METHOD OF ADMINISTRATION

Student

The CHKS may be administered on paper or online. The print versions of the core and supplemental modules vary in format. Because of their length and the need to have flexibility for customization and use of different modules, the student survey uses scannable answer forms separate from the questionnaire. The Core Module along with the supplementals modules of the student survey are available for online administration.

Staff

The staff survey is administered online. If you are having trouble taking the survey, check the following:

- Make sure you are entering the complete web address correctly
- Does the survey welcome page show the name of your school?
- DO NOT put www in the address
- Make sure you are entering it into the URL bar NOT the "search" bar (e.g google)

Parent

The parent survey is available online and for convenience, and because of the short length, it is also available as a printed, single scannable booklet (questions and answer together).

Pros and Cons to each survey method (Online and Paper):

- » **For students**, online survey administration may not be feasible in large districts/schools because of the lack of enough computers in locations that can ensure controlled administration with confidentiality.

- » **For staff** Online administration offers many conveniences; particularly that staff can even do it at home. Most staff have computer access and this speeds survey administration and data processing, and reduces costs.
- » **For parents**, both formats should be offered to parents. The best option may be to provide parents with paper forms and let them know that there is an online version. Printed forms are especially recommended because some parents don't have online computer access, but the online option should also be offered for those who find it more convenient. One of the virtues of online administration is that parents can take it from any computer, anywhere. However, make this as convenient as possible at the school. If computers are limited, dedicate one computer or a specific time when computers will be available for parents to use.

TASK 7: SELECT THE SAMPLES AND SUBMIT COUNTS

One of the first survey planning steps is to determine who will be included in the survey and to submit to the Technical Advisor a list of schools and for each school the estimated number of students, staff, and parents that will be asked to complete the survey.

Students

Most districts will need to survey all students in each recommended grade in all their schools to have representative data. Larger districts may request that a Technical Advisor develop a sampling plan; however, sampling is not required and districts may choose to survey all students in the selected grades, particularly if they would like school-level reports. See Task 17 for detailed information regarding selecting the sample and classrooms.

Staff

All staff within a school and district should be given the staff survey. This is especially important for two reasons. First, to have confidence that there is no bias in the results, that the results truly representative or valid of staff perceptions. Second, it helps preserve the confidentiality of those that do complete the survey. Limiting the survey to just certain grades may threaten anonymity, as it might be possible to identify the responses of certain teachers, especially in small schools. Perceptions of the school climate and learning barriers/supports may also vary by grade and subject.

The staff survey should be conducted:

- » In all the schools and all grade levels.
- » To all teachers, administrators, and other certificated staff working in each school, including paraprofessionals and aides, regardless of grade;
- » To all personnel working in the areas of counseling, health, prevention, and safety.
- » Staff working at multiple sites should be counted in the target sample at all sites. It is up to the individual staff person to decide for which sites they will fill out surveys. They should not fill out a survey if they don't think they work at that site enough to answer the questions. Similarly, it may be inappropriate for off-site staff such as bus drivers and district personnel to take the survey, as they are not tied to a specific school site. If you have questions about whether to include certain staff in your survey, contact your Technical Advisors.

Parents

The CSPS is generally offered to all parents, guardians, or other caregivers in a school or district, even if the student survey is being administered in 5, 7, 9, 11 or nontraditional schools. Sampling a smaller population presents serious technical obstacles, although it can be discussed with Technical Advisors. Only one survey should be completed for each child in a school. It can be filled out by parents together or just by one of them. If a parent has more than one child at a school site, the parent is instructed to complete one survey per school, thinking about their oldest child at the school.

TASK 8: SUBMIT MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Districts that administer any one of the Cal-SCHLS surveys are required to sign a Memorandum of Understanding. (MOU). The MOU outlines the responsibilities of both the district staff and the Technical Advisors and the conditions that must be met in administering the survey.

TASK 9: OBTAIN SUPPORT OF PRINCIPALS AND IDENTIFY SCHOOL COORDINATORS

Send out letters and information packets to the principals. Include the letters of support you obtained from the superintendent and other stakeholders.

Meet with all the principals personally to answer their questions and obtain their support. Emphasize how important it is that they strongly communicate the value of the survey(s) and their expectations that teachers will fully support it and comply with all procedures. The most successful surveys have occurred when the school administration has clearly expressed its expectations for success to the staff.

For large districts, have each principal identify one person to serve as the School Coordinator. Even in small districts, it is good to have one person at each school to be an onsite survey spokesperson, encouraging support, making sure participating teachers are well-informed, and monitoring the parent consent process. Give each School Coordinator a copy of the School Instructions for survey administration, which you can download from chks.wested.org and identify a training date. It's best if the School Coordinators meet for a brief training about their role in the survey, as is discussed under survey preparation.

TASK 10: SELECT SURVEY DATES

Establish a general time period in which you will administer the surveys. Then work with the School Coordinators to set up specific, convenient dates for each school.

Student, staff, and parent surveys don't have to be administered all on the same days, but they should be administered in as short of time period as possible and in close proximity (e.g., within two weeks). On a practical level, this will save time and effort. There will be efficiency in distributing survey materials and monitoring response rates. This will also help to engender broad awareness of, and enthusiasm for, the survey across stakeholders. This will help generate higher participation in all three groups in a synergistic effect, and thus help improve the quality of the data. It will also make the student survey easier to conduct by enhancing staff awareness and support.

Student Survey Issues

Start by selecting the date(s) for the student survey, as it involves the most planning. The date selected may affect student participation and survey results in several ways. In general, select dates that do not conflict with

other school activities, particularly testing and field trips. Use the following guidelines:

- » **Fall Surveys.** October through December is a good time because parent consent can be more easily obtained by sending parent consent forms out with registration materials at the beginning of the school year. These are also usually months in when you are less likely to conflict with scheduled testing.
- » **Spring Surveys.** Administer the survey no later than April to avoid busy school schedules and decreased attendance rates, particularly by 12th-grade students, at the end of the school year. Surveys conducted in the spring may result in higher prevalence rates for some risk behaviors and school climate indicators, as they increase as students age and the school year progresses.
- » **Holiday Periods.** Avoid administration after a long school break—particularly right after the winter holiday—because students may increase their health-risk behaviors during these periods. This particularly will affect thirty-day prevalence rates.
- » **Special Events.** Do **not** administer the survey during a special event.
- » **Poor Attendance Days.** Avoid administering the survey on the following days because attendance may be unusually low: any *Monday or Friday* (especially a Friday before a Monday holiday); the day right before or after *spring break*; and the *last month* of school.

TASK 11: ENCOURAGE SURVEY PARTICIPATION

Participation by students, staff, and parents is voluntary. However, it is important to encourage a high survey participation (response) rate to avoid a biased sample (i.e., ensure that the data is representative).

To create a thorough understanding of the value of the survey and the need for participation throughout the school-community. You should:

- » Conduct all three surveys around the same time (see Task 10 above).
- » Thoroughly inform students, staff, and parents about the survey's purpose, value, and procedures well in advance of administration. Use multiple venues (newsletters, meetings etc.)
- » Provide the letter of support from the superintendent or school board.
- » Have the principal encourage participation at staff and parent meetings.
- » Make survey completion as easy as possible. Often this means providing both online and print options.
- » Frequently remind them of the survey dates

Among the points to stress are:

- » The value of the survey data for: (1) addressing the needs of students that are barriers to learning and overall well-being, (2) improving school safety and both learning and teaching conditions, (3) addressing LCAP requirements, (http://cal-schls.wested.org/resources/LCAP_Cal_SCHLS.pdf) and, ultimately, (4) improving school attendance, academic performance, and graduation.
- » The opportunity it provides students, staff, and parents to communicate confidentially their perceptions and concerns about the school and its environment in a neutral context, as neither the school nor district is being rated or evaluated based on the results.

- » How you will report back the results to the school-community and involve them in reviewing the results and using the data for school involvement. Make sure students, staff, and parents all are aware that the school/district will take their data very seriously and involve them in the process of addressing their needs. This communicates that taking the survey is worth their time.

Student Issues. The first step in ensuring high student participation rates is obtaining high parental consent rates (see Task 3).

Parent Issues. Ensuring parent participation is especially challenging. Stress the convenience, simplicity, and brevity of the survey. For printed surveys, send them home with the parent consent forms (see Task 3) and include a check-off box on the form indicating that they received it. Give them many options for dropping off completed survey forms.

Staff Issues. Encouraging staff enthusiasm for the survey is also important for the essential task of monitoring parent consent and will help ensure high levels of participation. Staff need to carefully monitor this process to ensure that students are not inadvertently surveyed without parent consent. Making sure they take the survey seriously as important will help insure that this happens. Also, the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality is an important point to make among staff so that they feel that the survey is an opportunity to provide input about school climate.

TASK 12: MAKE THE SURVEYS AVAILABLE IN ADVANCE FOR PUBLIC VIEWING

As a requirement of informed parent consent (whether active or passive) and the Protection of Pupil Rights Act, the student survey must be *conveniently* available for staff and parents to review. This also helps allay concerns about the survey content.

This survey must be the actual version that is being administered by your district, including all the modules that the district has selected and any additional questions that it has included. If the content changes after parental notification, parents must be informed of this.

You should post your survey version on your own district website. However, because many people don't have Internet access you must also make it conveniently available at the district office.

Similarly posting the staff and parent surveys shows transparency and allows staff and parents to see how the three surveys are related.

TASK 13: DISTRIBUTE SURVEY MATERIALS

The District Coordinator will be sent all survey materials via mail or email for reproduction and distribution to the individual schools.

Student

Online Surveys. Survey administration materials will be sent to the District Coordinator via email. The materials will include school-specific login and passwords that will need to be distributed to School Coordinators. This document has two blanks for the District Coordinator to fill in with the Coordinator's contact information and the date(s) of the survey.

Paper Surveys. The District Coordinator will receive scannable answer sheets and transmittal envelopes for the number of students requested in Task 7. It is the district's responsibility to produce the student surveys. More detailed information about student survey administration can be found in the following section starting at Task 17.

Staff

Online Surveys. Survey administration materials will be sent to the District Coordinator via mail or email. This will include a master letter (*Survey Instructions for Staff*) for each participating school containing the school name, a school-specific login and password, and instructions on how to fill out the survey online. It has two blanks for the District Coordinator to fill in with the Coordinator's contact information and the date the survey window should open. Copy the letters and distribute one to each staff member at each site; e.g., put them in staff mailboxes or distributing at staff meetings. Staff should follow the instructions and fill out the survey online, from any computer.

Parents

Online Surveys. Survey administration materials will be sent to the District Coordinator via mail or email. The materials will include school-specific login and passwords, which will need to be distributed to School Coordinators. If you are doing an online-only survey, administration consists of getting the survey website address to all parents. Several strategies exist to accomplish this, including multiple direct mailings (a postcard can often suffice), sending notices home with children, posting notices at the school, through the school newsletter, and announcements and handouts at public meetings.

Paper Surveys. Administration of the paper survey is more challenging, because forms must get out to the parents, as well as back to the school or district. Two things to keep in mind when administering the parent survey: 1) Use multiple strategies and 2) provide return envelopes so the surveys can be returned anonymously. Some tested strategies are listed below:

Use multiple options to get surveys to parents.

- » Direct mailings.
- » Consider assigning someone, perhaps a parent volunteer, to hand out surveys during school drop-off and pick-up.
- » Send home with the student along with the active parent consent form.
- » Passing surveys out during parent meetings or during other school events.

Use multiple options to let parents return surveys.

- » Use a postage paid return envelope for surveys you mail out.
- » Consider assigning someone, perhaps a parent volunteer, to collect surveys during school drop-off and pick-up.
- » Send to school with the student in a sealed envelope.
- » Provide a drop-off box.

TASK 14: ENSURE CONFIDENTIALITY DURING ADMINISTRATION

Regardless of what survey administration method is selected, the conditions under which the survey is administered must preserve respondent privacy and the confidentiality of the responses. If administered to multiple people in large rooms, ensure that the set up prevents anyone from observing how the respondent is answering the question. This is particularly a concern for use of large-screen monitors in conducting the survey online.

TASK 15: MONITOR SURVEY COMPLETION

Monitoring survey completion is very important so you can determine if problems have occurred that need to be addressed.

Student

Monitoring parent consent of the student paper version of the survey is done early in the surveying process. See Task 10 for further detail. Online response rate monitoring is available at surveys.wested.org.

Staff

One of the advantages of online staff survey is that you can monitor participation online in “real time” (view how many surveys have been completed at any given time). Staff survey data may be viewed at the district level with all schools combined, by school type and by individual school. If participation appears low, it may help to distribute a reminder and have the principal again reiterate his or her support for the survey.

Online response rate monitoring for the staff survey is not available to school level staff or administrators. As an alternative, you may also ask each staff person to print out the last page of the online survey, where he/she logs out of the system, and return it to a site-level Coordinator as proof of participation. (This page does not contain any answers or identifying information.) Since anonymity and confidentiality is of major importance, if this option is used, staff should be given the opportunity to return this page to a site level Coordinator in a way to preserves privacy. Having staff appoint a trusted colleague to collect this information may be a workable solution.

Parents

As mentioned under Task 11, ensuring parent participation is especially challenging. Strategies to increase the response rate include multiple mailings, reminders, and encouraging participation through the steps listed in Task 11.

TASK 16: RETURN COMPLETED SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

For Paper Surveys: Each School Coordinator is responsible for collecting all answer sheets for students and parents. Student answer sheets should have already been placed in Transmittal Envelops (provided) immediately after students completed the survey. Once all Transmittal Envelops have been collected, forward to the District Coordinator. The Technical Advisors will process the paper answer sheets and combine the results with any online surveys.

For Online Surveys: Once all sites have completed the survey, click the "close survey" button at the far right on the survey tracking page, which can be accessed through surveys.wested.org. The Technical Advisors will process the paper answer sheets and combine the results with any online surveys.

The previous section contained information and instructions pertinent to all three surveys. This section provides additional, detailed tasks for the student survey that include sampling, parent consent, and other important factors.

TASK 17: SELECT SAMPLE

A Technical Advisor will help you determine your specific sample requirements. To receive the CDE subsidized cost as shown on the fee schedule, the district must administer the Core survey (Module A) to grades seven and nine every two years. However, districts should conduct a representative district-wide, grade-level survey of students who are in grades 7, 9, and 11 in comprehensive schools. (Information about non-traditional schools is found at the end of this section.)

School and Classroom Sampling Procedures

Most districts will need to survey all students in each selected grade in all their schools. Larger districts may request that a technical advisor develop a sampling plan; however, sampling is not required and districts may choose to survey all students in the selected grades, particularly if they would like school—level reports. Eligibility for sampling is based on the following criteria:

- » **Number of students.** If a district has 900 or fewer regular students enrolled per grade level, all students must be surveyed, regardless of the number of schools. (Note: This is total enrollment, not the number who consented to the survey.) If grade-level enrollment is more than 900, the district may choose to sample. Technical Advisors will randomly select classrooms across all schools to reach the target sample of 900.

However, we recommend that sampling be done only if the district has 1600 or more students per grade.

This is recommended, as enrollments below 1600 tend to leave out just a few classes per school, which could lead to possible resentment on the part of teachers and/or inability to easily schedule a “grade-wide” survey day.

- » **Number of schools.** If a district has ten or fewer schools at a surveyed grade level, all schools must be surveyed. A random sample of schools can be selected for districts with more than ten schools with the grades involved AND more than 900 students per grade.

These cutoff numbers were selected to balance logistical efficiency with adequate precision of results. If 900 students per grade are selected, the minimum recommended sample size of approximately 625 students can be

expected to actually participate—after eliminating those students without returned signed parent consent forms, those with returned negative parent consent forms, those who individually decline to participate, and those absent on the survey day.

Meeting the minimum sample requirements is absolutely essential for obtaining representative data.

Determine Additional Sample Needs

These are the minimum requirements. You may decide local needs warrant surveying more grades, students, or schools, particularly if you:

- » Have previously collected data from other grades;
- » Have special programs targeting other grades;
- » Want to assess differences among your schools; and/or
- » Are incorporating the CHKS into a program evaluation.

Collecting School-level Data

School-level planning is strongly encouraged so that the program is owned by and relevant to each unique school site. For most districts, the survey plan will result in representative data from all schools. However, large districts that choose to sample may want to expand their sample to allow for school-level data and reports. Generally, this involves including all students in the designated grades in each school. It is up to the district to request a report on each school before survey administration.

School-level data are especially valuable if schools in a district vary markedly in their student demographics, programs, or services. There is an additional charge of \$75.00 for each individual school report. In addition to the school level data report, Cal-SCHLS also offers a School Climate Report Card (SCRC) for an additional charge of \$100.00. To read more about the SCRC <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/CSRC/searchname.aspx>. However, some schools initially may be wary of being compared and stigmatized. A response to this concern is provided in the Frequently Asked Questions available at chks.wested.org.

Continuation and Other Non-traditional Schools

Surveying continuation and non-traditional schools provides a more comprehensive picture of health risks among all local youth. Since grade designations are not clear in many non-traditional schools, survey all students regardless of age or grade (i.e., 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12). All grades 7-12 should be given the high school version of the survey. At the upper-grade level, the results are listed separately in your reports.

Because of the difficulty of surveying and obtaining parental consent in other non-traditional school settings such as adult education, alternative, county community, juvenile hall, opportunity, and state special schools, their inclusion in the survey is optional.

TASK 18: SELECT CLASSROOMS

A Technical Advisor will help you determine your specific sample requirements. Districts must conduct a representative district-wide, grade-level survey of students who are in grades 7, 9, and 11 in comprehensive schools.

Most districts—as they will be attempting to survey all students in targeted grade levels—will need to specify a required class subject for surveying that will cover all enrolled students in each grade in each school. Experience shows that the best required class subjects are English or Health for 7th and 9th grades, and English or History for 11th grade.

Some large districts may need technical assistance to randomly select a sample of classrooms and/or schools to survey. Once the sample has been identified the sampling plan must be fully implemented by the district.

- » The District must obtain from each School Coordinator and provide to the Technical Advisors numbers lists of all grade-level classrooms in each school, with each class numbered and identified by teacher's last name. This class list can include either the entire school or just the required classes, whichever is most convenient.
- » Technical Advisors will randomly select the classrooms and return the list to the district coordinator.

TASK 19: CHOOSE A PARENT CONSENT OPTION—PASSIVE OR ACTIVE

Each approach is defined below.

Passive Parent Consent. Written notice is sent to parents/guardians about the survey, who in turn notify the school ONLY if they do not want their child to participate in the survey. The challenge with passive parent consent is ensuring that parents are fully notified.

The following conditions must be met to use passive parent consent:

- » Passive parent consent is limited to grades 7 through 12. Passive parent consent cannot be used below grade 7.
- » The survey must be anonymous, confidential, and voluntary.
- » The school board formally adopts, in consultation with parents, a passive parent consent policy for the administration of the CHKS for Students.
- » Parents/guardians are notified in writing at the beginning of the school year about the survey, the approximate administration date, and given a reasonable opportunity to review the survey and to decline their child's participation.
- » Questions are not added to the survey that elicit reports of parental attitudes or behaviors or any other category that requires active parent consent under Education Code 51513 and is not exempted under Education Code 51938. This includes questions about the pupil's personal beliefs or practices in sex, family life, morality, and religion, or any questions about the pupil's parents' or guardians' beliefs and practices in sex, family life, morality, and religion

The principal benefits of passive parent consent are:

- » It involves less cost and labor, particularly for the classroom teacher.
- » It will almost certainly result in higher response rates.
- » Passive parent consent will probably result in a more representative sample, as many hard-to-reach subgroups, including groups at high-risk of substance use and other problem behaviors, may be

underrepresented in active parent consent surveys.

Active Parent Consent. No child can be surveyed until a parent/guardian has provided written permission. If a permission form is not returned, it must be assumed that parental permission has not been granted. The challenge with active parent consent is making sure that parents receive and return the forms to the school.

The following conditions must be met to use active parent consent:

- » Active parent consent may be used at all grade levels. It **MUST** be used below grade 7.
- » The survey must be anonymous, confidential, and voluntary.
- » The school board formally adopts, in consultation with parents, an active parent consent policy for the administration of the CHKS.
- » Parents/guardians are notified in writing at the beginning of the school year about the survey, the approximate administration date, and given a reasonable opportunity to review the survey.

The principal benefit of active parent consent is:

- » It provides extra protection against surveying a student whose parent/guardian claims not to have received notification, or who did not approve of participation but failed to inform the school. This extra protection may be important if risk behavior surveys are a sensitive issue in your community.

TASK 20: DEVELOP PARENT CONSENT LETTERS

After your school board policy is in place, prepare the parent consent letter/notification form (referred to as “parent consent letter” for the purposes of this document). Modifiable forms for both active and passive parent consent can be downloaded from www.chks.wested.org under Parent Consent. Translations are available in Spanish and other languages. If you make another language translation, we would appreciate receiving a copy so that we can make it available to others.

Minimum Requirements for Parent Consent Letters

Parents must feel confident that every reasonable effort has been made to protect their privacy and that they have been fully informed about the survey. Below is a list of minimum requirements for parent consent letters, with specific requirements for passive and active parent consent:

- » Passive parent consent letters must include the location or person where parents can decline their child’s participation, with instructions on how to do so.
- » Active parent consent letters must give parents the opportunity to grant or decline their child’s participation, with instructions on how to do so.

Regardless of parent consent type, letters must contain:

- » The survey’s purpose, content, and methods;

- » Student rights to privacy and confidentiality, and procedures for protecting these rights;
- » Any potential harm from participation;
- » The names and telephone numbers of *school or district personnel* to contact for additional information; and
- » The location where they can review the instrument

The following statements must also be added to the letter if administering the specific module, as follows:

- » **RYDM Questions About the Home Environment**, add “To further assess resilience and healthy development, there are questions about adult relationships, expectations, and participation in the home.”
- » **Safety and Violence Module**, add that it includes items on “considering, planning, or attempting to commit suicide.”
- » **Sexual Behavior Module**, add that it includes questions about “sexual behavior and practices leading to HIV/ AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy.”

TASK 21: DISTRIBUTE LETTERS TO PARENTS

Although the details surrounding parent consent form distribution vary for passive versus active parent consent, the basic issues are the same. You'll need to distribute the parent consent forms, implement strategies to increase participation, and motivate your school staff. It's also important to make special considerations when working with non-traditional schools.

Parent Consent Form Distribution

For Passive Parent Consent: Classroom distribution is not recommended for passive parent consent because of the risk that students will never give the parent consents to their parents and will thus be surveyed without permission. Home mailing is strongly recommended for the distribution of passive parent consent letters, especially options that verify your efforts to inform parents (e.g., those that require a signature from the recipient).

For Active Parent Consent: For ease in monitoring parent consent returns, districts using active parent consent have the option of sending an informative letter before or at the beginning of the school year, and distributing the actual active parent consent form at least two weeks before the survey date. Nevertheless, sending the actual parent consent letter before the start of school and again closer to the survey may allow time to implement a more aggressive outreach effort if the initial return rate is low.

Research and experience show that most parents do not object to student participation. The challenge is making sure they return the signed parent consent forms. If a signed parent consent form is not returned, approval has not been granted.

Tips for Form Distribution

Consider using the following strategies to help insure that parents receive and return the forms. They are part of the *School Instructions* that we include in each packet of classroom materials you distribute.

- » **Combine with other important material requiring signatures.** When possible, send the letter to parents along with other important materials that they have to sign and return. This will increase the chances that the letter will not be overlooked or ignored. For example, it could be included in the registration or enrollment

materials sent to all parents in the beginning of the school year, or with the school emergency cards.

- » **Use multiple contact techniques.** This is particularly important when employing passive parent consent, to avoid any parent complaint that their child took the survey without parent awareness. Be sure to document your efforts.
- » **Home mailing.** In addition to being the recommended strategy to use for passive parent consent, home mailing may be useful for active parent consent when used in combination with other techniques, such as classroom distribution.
- » **Announce survey to parents.** Before or while sending out the forms, alert parents through the school newsletter or other communication method when they will be receiving them.
- » **Give parents a deadline date.** Give parents a deadline for returning the letter or informing the school that they do or do not want their child to participate.
- » **Include letters of support.** Include a letter of support from the superintendent, principal, or other official.
- » **Send all parent consent information and forms via a method that guarantees receipt.** Preferably, use a method that documents receipt. For example, put the letter into a parent handbook that the parent signs for, or send via a mailing method that requires a signature from the recipient.

Motivating School Staff

It is essential that you fully inform and motivate all school staff to support the survey and work to make sure the parent consent process goes smoothly.

- » When using passive parent consent, school staff may not be directly involved in the distribution of parent consent letters or collection of refusals; however, they may be asked to respond to questions by parents or students.
- » When using active parent consent, staff motivation is especially important; it is the teacher who has to take on the primary responsibilities for obtaining parent consent and tracking which parents have returned the forms and which have not. The teacher also is the survey representative to parents, the person parents turn to for survey information. Their role in making sure you achieve your targeted response rate—or making sure that you don't survey a student by accident—is absolutely critical. The website (chks.wested.org) includes a handout of *Teacher Instructions* to assist in this effort.

Regardless of which type of parent consent you use, it is important to:

- » **Motivate the Whole School.** Don't limit your efforts to just the selected classrooms. A supportive environment throughout the school helps overcome pockets of resistance.
- » **Involve School Leaders.** Schools that have been most successful in obtaining high student participation rates are schools where there is strong administrative support of the survey. Make sure that the school principal strongly communicates this to the teachers.
- » **Promote Awareness.** Make sure all school staff understands the importance of the survey and the critical role that the process plays in making sure results are representative and useful. Teachers who have been involved all along are more likely to be enthusiastic supporters.

- » **Express Appreciation.** Send letters thanking the School Coordinator and teachers in advance for their cooperation.

Responding to Teacher Concerns

Some teachers may be resistant to the survey for personal reasons, or because it takes away instruction time, complicates scheduled lesson plans, or requires more work on their part. These concerns must be overcome. For this audience, emphasize:

- » There are links between health and academic achievement that must be taken into consideration in any school improvement effort (for useful information, refer to the Health & Achievement section of the CHKS website).
- » Measures have been taken to make their CHKS tasks as easy as possible, such as model parent consent forms and procedures, detailed instructions, and scripted administration.
- » Though the survey process is challenging, it also offers opportunities to better inform parents about the school prevention and health programs. It can be a positive opportunity for outreach.

Working with Continuation and other Non-traditional Schools

Obtaining parent consent for continuation and other alternative school students is especially challenging. Not only are they older, but many of the characteristics of these schools and students make obtaining active parent consent very difficult. It is necessary that you double your efforts to make sure that the parents receive and return the forms.

If court or community day schools are included in the sample, a universal parent consent from the head of Probation can be obtained for all students within the criminal justice system, if judged appropriate under Ed Code Section 51513. Be sure to carefully evaluate your county's guardianship arrangements before surveying.

TASK 22: MONITOR PARENT CONSENT FORM RETURNS

A critical step in the parent consent process is monitoring the return of the forms. The method you choose for monitoring returns may vary depending on a school's structure and the method of parent consent you use. Carefully track the distribution and return of forms so you can identify students whose parents never returned the parent consent form or declined participation.

- » **For passive parent consent**, it may be better to have a single person or office, identified in district policies and communications, responsible for monitoring and recording refusals. This will help avoid parent refusals from slipping through the cracks.
- » **For active parent consent**, it is usually most convenient for the classroom teacher to monitor returns. If you have enough advance time, you can mail the parent consent forms to non-responding parents. Research shows telephone reminders to non-responding parents are very effective. If your school has an automated phone calling system, it can be used to send out messages. Incentives for students and teachers may also be effective.

If one week before the survey the targeted parent return rates are not being reached in any classroom or school, contact your Technical Advisor immediately. It is best to postpone the survey if you cannot meet sample standards.

TASK 23: TRAIN SCHOOL COORDINATORS, TEACHERS, AND PROCTORS

It is very important that all people involved in the survey—School Coordinators, teachers, and proctors—thoroughly understand its importance and the tasks for which they are responsible. The best way to assure this is through training. Your goal should be to not only inform them but to garner their enthusiastic support. Everyone can be trained at once, or you can train groups at different times. For large districts, you may want to train only the School Coordinators—and have them hold training meetings with the teachers and proctors at their individual schools.

The survey instructions and materials are designed to make this easy. Instructions for all three groups are available on the Administer the Survey page of the chks.wested.org website. **Different instructions must be used depending on which type(s) of parent consent you are using**, so be sure you are using the correct materials. Make sure the instructions and materials are distributed well in advance of the training so staff have time to review them. This will reduce the time needed for training.

School Coordinators

Ideally, training for School Coordinators should occur early, certainly prior to the beginning of the student parent consent process. This should be a general training touching upon all aspects of the survey, but focusing on the responsibilities detailed in the [School Instructions](#).

Topics should include:

- » The purpose, value, and requirements of the Survey;
- » A description of the parent consent process, highlighting special concerns for the type of parent consent you are using (such as high parent consent rates for active and the withdrawal process for passive);
- » The importance of maintaining standard survey administration procedures;
- » Ways to motivate and monitor teachers;
- » Confidentiality and privacy issues;
- » The survey administration schedule; and
- » Their role in documenting school, class, and student participation, including how to fill out the transmittal form.

The most important topics, arguably, are the value of the Survey, the importance of the parent consent process, and the need for School Coordinators to motivate and monitor teachers.

Teachers

The teacher training should cover the same areas as that for School Coordinators, although not necessarily with the same focus. What is most important is motivating them to support the survey and communicate this enthusiasm to the students. Go over the [Teacher Instructions](#) with them, emphasizing the important role that teachers play in the parent consent process and in providing correct information on the Transmittal Envelopes if doing a paper administration.

If teaching staff will also be proctoring the survey, go over the proctor information as well.

Proctors

It is most important that proctors uniformly follow the procedures provided in the *Proctor Instructions*. If proctors are not fully informed and prepared, students may not take the survey seriously, may incorrectly fill out the answer forms, or may not be able to complete the survey within the period. Review the following topics:

- » Room setup;
- » Confidentiality and privacy issues, including what to do with the Assurance of Confidentiality Agreement (attached);
- » Where students can go if they have questions or concerns arising from survey participation;
- » The survey administration schedule; and
- » How to present and administer the online and/or print survey to students, including the importance of reading the Introductory Script;

TASK 24: COLLECT SIGNED CONFIDENTIALITY ASSURANCES

All staff involved in administering the survey must sign the Assurance of Confidentiality of Survey Data (attached). You can do this on the day of the survey, or ask staff to fill them out during the training sessions. This communicates that the commitment to confidentiality is a serious one and reinforces the survey administrator's obligation to protect student privacy. These assurances can be made available for parents to view along with the survey instrument.

TASK 25: PREPARE TO ANSWER STUDENT CONCERNS

Make arrangements at the district or school level for someone, such as a counselor or health/prevention specialist, to be available to students who have questions or concerns as a result of their participation in the survey. Be sure your staff know who this person is, and know where to send the students. This is one of the necessary procedures to reduce any potential risks to students from taking the survey, as stated in the parent consent form

TASK 26: CONFIRM PARENT CONSENT

About three weeks prior to the scheduled survey administration, start checking with each School Coordinator:

- » **For active parent consent**, make sure forms have been sent to parents or guardians and reemphasize the importance of a high return rate;
- » **For passive parent consent**, make sure withdrawals are being carefully tracked;

One week before the survey, contact each School Coordinator and ensure that:

- » **For active parent consent**, enough parent consent forms have been received to assure that each school and grade will reach the 70% return rate (either consenting or not consenting). If not, immediately to discuss delaying the survey.
- » **For passive parent consent**, lists of non-participants are being prepared for the teachers.

TASK 27: SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

About three weeks prior to the scheduled survey administration, start checking with each School Coordinator:

- » Confirm the time and place of the survey administration;
- » Confirm the classes to be surveyed;
- » Review the procedures that will occur during administration.
- » Follow-up with a printed reminder to all School Coordinators and teachers

Two or three days before the survey, review with the School Coordinator and, if possible, the proctors themselves, the procedures for the survey day at the school, including room setup, and arrangements for students who do not have parent consent and are not taking the survey. Make sure each School Coordinator has contacted the proctors and distributed the needed survey materials to each classroom. These include:

- » For online surveys, login and passwords specific to each school site which are sent to you by your Technical Advisors;
- » For paper surveys, answer sheets surveys, and transmittal envelopes;
- » For passive parent consent, a list of students whose parents denied participation;
- » Teacher Instructions;
- » Proctor Instructions, including the Assurance of Confidentiality and Introductory Script;
- » Arrangement of the room:
 - » For online surveys, arrange the room so that no one else but the student can see the answers on the computer monitor;
 - » For paper surveys, arrange the room so that no one else but the student can see the answers on the answer sheets;
- » Survey Documentation:
 - » For paper surveys, instruct each proctor to provide the information on the Transmittal Envelopes

One day before the survey, re-contact each School Coordinator to see if they need any help and remind them to contact you if any problems materialize on the day of the survey.

The day of the survey, conduct the survey.

The day after the survey,

- » For paper surveys, collect all completed answer sheets in their Transmittal Envelopes to the District Coordinator

SURVEY PLANNING CHECKLIST

BEFORE SURVEY	DUE DATE	PERSON RESPONSIBLE		TASK	PLANNING AND CONDUCTING THE SURVEY
12 weeks				1.	Contact a Survey Technical Advisor
12 weeks				2.	Identify District Survey Coordinator
12 weeks				3.	Obtain Superintendent and School Board Approval
12 weeks				4.	Form Advisory Committee
11 weeks				5.	Determine Goals and Data Needs
10 weeks				6.	Select Method of Administration
10 weeks				7.	Select the Samples and Submit Counts
10 weeks				8.	Submit Memorandum of Understanding
8 weeks				9.	Obtain Support of Principals and Identify School Coordinators
Ongoing				10.	Select Survey Dates
8 weeks				11.	Encourage Survey Participation
4 weeks				12.	Make the Surveys Available in Advance for Public Viewing
Ongoing				13.	Distribute survey materials
2 weeks				14.	Ensure confidentiality during administration
2 weeks				15.	Monitor Survey Completion
After survey administration					Return completed answer sheets and close survey at surveys.wested.org