

City of Newton



Setti D. Warren
Mayor

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Dori Zaleznik, MD., Commissioner
1294 Centre Street
Newton, MA 02459-1544

Telephone 617.796.1420 Fax 617.552.7063



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

October 2012

Dear Parents or Guardians:

As has been done every other year since 1998, the School Department and the Newton Health and Human Services Department will once again be administering the Newton Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) this November to middle and high school students in the Newton Public Schools. The survey is based on the Massachusetts YRBS, which is developed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). **The survey is anonymous.**

This letter serves as parental notification under the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment. This federal law requires the Newton Public Schools to notify you and either to obtain consent or allow you to opt your child out of participating in certain school activities including surveys that address potentially sensitive topics.

The Newton YRBS has three different survey versions – one for high school students, one for students in grades 7 and 8, and one for students in grade 6. Each version is customized based on topic sensitivity and the developmental level of students to understand the questions. The survey addresses a variety of topics including: alcohol, tobacco and other drug use; violence and safety; mental and physical health (e.g. stress, mental health conditions, sexual issues, dietary behavior, physical activity); and other general information (e.g. participation in extracurricular activities).

The survey data will be managed, analyzed, and reported only in total by an external consulting firm. Information from the survey will be made available to all community members. It is used to develop better prevention and intervention programs, curricula that address the health needs of our children, and to provide data for the school system to comply with the No Child Left Behind federal legislation.

The Newton YRBS will be administered during the week of November 12-16, 2012 (note the November 12 Veteran's Day holiday) in homerooms or during a regular class period and will take approximately one period to complete. **Your child's participation is strictly voluntary.** No names are entered anywhere on the survey, and individual student responses will not be identified or reported. There is **no** link between student participation and academic records.

If you wish to look at the survey, copies to review will be available in late October in Room 214 at the Education Center, 100 Walnut Street. You should make an appointment with Dede Reade at 617-559-6115. The survey must be viewed in person; copies cannot be removed from the office nor sent to you by mail. Specific questions about the survey should be directed to Gwen Smith, K-8 Wellness Curriculum Coordinator at 617-559-9090.

If you should decide you do not want your child to participate in the survey, you should notify the principal of your child's school no later than November 5, 2012. If you have not contacted the principal, survey administrators will assume that you have consented to have your child participate. This is an active opt-out process. However, even if you do not contact the principal, your child may voluntarily decide not to participate in the survey or may choose to skip any questions he or she may not feel comfortable answering.

By conducting similar surveys every other year for so many years, we have found the YRBS to be very helpful in identifying trends in student behaviors and concerns that have assisted the school system in preparing curricula to deal with sensitive issues. We hope your student will be able to participate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dori Zaleznik MD". The signature is written in a cursive style with a loop at the end of the last name.

Dori Zaleznik, MD, Commissioner
Health & Human Services Department

David Fleishman, Superintendent
Newton Public Schools