

MINNESOTA STUDENT SURVEY CHANGES: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What changed and why?

In 2013, grade levels administered the survey changed from 6th, 9th, and 12th grades to 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grades. Legislation passed in 2011 requires the Department of Education to report summary data “on school safety and students’ engagement and connection at school” at the school, district and state levels. The Department proposed to meet this requirement by switching the survey from 6th to 5th grade so that summary data would become available for the many K-5 elementary schools in the state. The Department submitted several proposals for questions or scales to measure these concepts. After many rounds of discussion and amendment, the current questions were accepted by the Research Team. To keep the 3-year cohort sequence, they included 8th and 11th grades. In order to be able to look at some trends, 9th grade was kept in. One benefit from the changes is that participation among 11th graders is somewhat higher than participation among 12th graders had traditionally been.

Questions were added to address reporting requirements. In addition to the required student engagement questions, a question regarding past 30 day prescription drug misuse was added to meet a National Outcome Measure reporting requirement. Questions were also added to cover new topics. Some examples of new topics include: school climate, student engagement, sexual orientation, cyber bullying and reasons for being bullied, missed meals, missed classes, secondhand smoke, synthetic drugs, and texting while driving.

Questions were changed to better align with national surveys. The question regarding binge drinking was changed from past two week binge drinking to past 30 day binge drinking. The questions about self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts were reworded and new response options included for self-harm. While some new Adverse Childhood Experiences questions were added, some questions were reworded to align with national surveys. Questions were also changed based on identification or more reliable measures.

Some questions were dropped due to changes in state priorities. Some examples of questions deleted to make room for new questions include: alcohol or drug use at school, alcohol or drug use being a problem for a family member, sources of alcohol information, use of a fake ID to buy alcohol, access to tobacco, age at first use of tobacco, and questions about problem gambling.

Lastly, the survey administration mode changed. Schools had the option of administering the survey online versus using a paper and pencil survey. No significant difference in responses were seen between the online and paper versions.

How can we look at trends?

In 2013, the MSS was administered to grades 5, 8, 9, and 11. In previous years, the survey was administered to grades 6, 9, and 12. In addition, a number of survey questions changed in wording to meet federal reporting requirements or to better align with national surveys.

Because of these changes, care should be taken when looking at trends over time.

Only look at trends for 9th graders, and only for those survey questions that have not changed over time. Do not compare 2013 data for all grades combined to data from previous years for all grades combined. Rates for risky behaviors like substance use tend to increase with grade level; since lower grade levels are now being surveyed, lower rates of use in 2013 cannot necessarily be interpreted as a decline in use. Changes to the wording of a question can significantly change responses. For example, the question about binge drinking was changed from “in the past two weeks” to “in the past 30 days” which will likely result in higher reported rates.

When reviewing, interpreting, and sharing findings, focus on magnitude and comparisons as opposed to time trends. Which substances are being used at greater rates than others? Is use higher in your community than in the state as a whole? Are rates higher among females as compared to males? Even though time trends can't be used with most questions, other dimensions can be used to identify key findings.

Which specific MSS questions changed in 2013?**Students' Background:**

- New questions about Somali and Hmong ethnic identity
- New question about sexual orientation

School:

- New questions about student engagement
- New questions about reasons for missed class, and skipping part of a day
- New questions about feeling safe at home, in one's neighborhood, at school, and going to and from school
- New questions about where students go after school
- New questions about teachers caring about students and treating them fairly
- New bullying questions, including whether students exhibited bullying behaviors themselves, reasons for being bullied, cyberbullying, and spreading mean rumors or lies
- New response options for after school plans (i.e., military, work, license/certificate)
- New response options for grades usually received
- Some questions about perceived school environment were deleted (i.e., students are friendly, student behave well in hallways, gangs are a problem at school, alcohol and drugs are a problem at school)

Out of School Activities:

- New response options for after school activities (i.e., arts and crafts, bike or walk), and change in question wording from “in a typical week” to “in a typical day”
- New response options for use of time (i.e., changed IM-ing to using an app), and change in question wording from “in a typical week” to “in a typical day”
- New response options for school activities (i.e., student leadership/council), and change in question wording from “in a typical year” to “in a typical week”
- New response options for reason students participate in activities (i.e., help me succeed in school, feel more connected to my community)

Health:

- New question about homelessness
- Some new questions were added about adverse childhood experiences, and others were reworded
- New question about overall health, as well as questions about diabetes and allergies
- New question about last dental visit
- New question about average hours of sleep
- New question about use of tanning beds
- New question about gym class or Physical Education, and questions about physical activity reworded from “at least 30 minutes” of activity to “at least 60 minutes”
- New questions regarding number of days breakfast is eaten, skipped meals, source of lunch, and consumption of fast food
- New questions about distracted driving
- New questions about developmental assets (i.e., feel good about self, feel in control of life and future)
- Questions about physical or mental health problems were reworded
- Questions about juice, fruit, and vegetable consumption were separated, and response options about beverages consumed were changed
- The question about seat belt use was divided into questions about use in the front seat and in the back seat
- Mental health is now assessed using the GAIN Short Screener
- Questions about suicidal ideation and attempts were reworded, and the question about self-harm was reworded to reflect frequency rather than any past year self-harm
- Questions about alcohol and drug use causing family problems were deleted
- Questions about weight-loss strategies employed were deleted
- Questions about sources of information on alcohol, drugs and sex were deleted

Behavior:

- New questions about exposure to second hand smoke were added
- New questions about past 30 day prescription drug misuse, perceived harm from misuse, and parental disapproval of misuse were added
- New questions about misuse of synthetic drugs and over-the-counter drugs were added
- New questions on parental communication about substance use were added
- New questions about perceived peer use were added
- New questions were added about substance use before last sexual intercourse, and about last birth control method used
- The question about binge drinking was reworded from “past two weeks” to “past 30 days”
- Questions about parental perceptions of substance use were reworded from “disapproval” to “how wrong” they feel it would be to use substances
- Questions about problem gambling were deleted
- Questions about use of a fake ID to buy alcohol were deleted
- Questions about access to tobacco, and age at first use of tobacco were deleted
- Questions about age at first use of drugs other than marijuana were deleted
- Questions about use of alcohol or drugs right before, during, or right after school were deleted
- Questions about riding in a car with an impaired driver were deleted
- Questions about frequency of condom and birth control use were deleted