

2025 PAYS

Pennsylvania Youth Survey

PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

Information about the 2025 PAYS and answers to the most frequently asked questions.



Introduction

From September to December 2025, the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) will be conducted throughout the state. PAYS has been conducted every other year since 1989. **In the most recent administration, 407 school districts and non-traditional schools in 66 counties participated in PAYS.** In 2025, PAYS will again be offered to all public, private, and charter schools in the state at NO COST, thanks to the sponsorship of the state agency partners. This fact sheet provides answers to questions you may have about the 2025 PAYS.



PAYS is supported by:

Pennsylvania Department of Education, Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, and Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency



PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Pennsylvania Youth Survey?

The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) is a biennial survey of youth in the 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades. PAYS asks questions about students' perspectives of their school environment, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors concerning mental health, alcohol, tobacco, other drugs (ATOD), violence, and other health risk behaviors. The survey also collects information about risk factors, which are the conditions that increase the likelihood that a child will develop problem behaviors later in life. It also collects information about protective factors – people or conditions in a community that can buffer youth from risk.

What is the purpose of PAYS?

PAYS gathers local data and information needed to identify appropriate prevention and intervention programs to address such problems as mental health concerns, substance use, and violence in our schools and communities. Schools, government agencies, local stakeholders, and community prevention coalitions use PAYS data to assess issues facing youth in a community, identify programming that can be used to address the locally-identified problems, select curricula, and demonstrate the need for funding through grant submissions and presentations to potential funders. It also helps schools, districts, and counties judge the effectiveness of current prevention and intervention efforts and to make appropriate corrections. In addition, PAYS seeks youth input on protective factors or supports in their communities, family lives, and interpersonal relationships that help them succeed in life. Through PAYS data, especially the risks faced by and protections available to youth, communities can utilize a data-driven decision-making process to use limited prevention resources best.



PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

What schools are eligible to participate?

In 2025, PAYS is once again being offered to all schools, including public, private, parochial, cyber, and charter schools in Pennsylvania, at no charge. Bach Harrison, Survey Contractor, is communicating with District Superintendents and Charter/Non-Public School Administrators regarding registration for the 2025 PAYS and PAYS Jr. If you would like to request that a registration link be shared with you, please reach out to PAYSSupport@bach-harrison.com and provide the name of your District or Charter/Non-Public School.

Why should my school participate?

PAYS is the only survey offered in Pennsylvania that collects the level of detailed risk and protective factor data used to identify individual community needs. Schools, school districts, and counties can then work with local prevention partners to select and implement appropriate services that address the specific risk and protective factors identified by PAYS data. Reports (generated at state, county, and school levels) produced from the results will provide information on problems such as mental health concerns, substance use, and bullying and the risk and protective factors, such as commitment to the school, that influence those problems. PAYS gives youth a voice in the decisions being made for them. This perspective is often missing from prevention planning discussions.

Furthermore, PAYS results can be used to help ensure that participating counties continue to make essential prevention funding available, which benefits area school districts, schools, and the community. PAYS data can be used to inform local funding decisions, included in grant applications to state and federal government, and included in funding requests to foundations and private sector funders.



PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

Is student participation anonymous?

Yes, completely anonymous and confidential.

Students who complete the paper-based survey are given a survey booklet containing the question items and a place to record responses. The survey booklet will not contain the student's name or other identifying information. Before they begin, students must be reminded not to write their name or other identifying information on the booklet. When completing the survey, students will be arranged in the classroom so their responses cannot be seen by the proctor or any of the students' peers. At the end of the class period, each student will immediately place the survey booklets in an envelope. The envelope will be sealed. Each school's contact will pick up the completed surveys in the sealed envelopes and ship them directly to the PAYS vendor, Bach Harrison, L.L.C., in Salt Lake City, Utah, using a prepaid FedEx Ground label.

Students who complete the survey online are given an anonymous link. Online responses do not include the student's name or other identifying information.

Are sensitive questions asked?

The survey includes questions related to alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; violent behaviors; mental health; other health risk behaviors; and related risk and protective factors. The survey questions are designed to measure attitudes and behaviors. Unless questions in these topic areas are asked directly, prevention planners cannot know the degree to which the youth in Pennsylvania engage in these health risk behaviors. It is important to remember the survey is anonymous and confidential, so no student's responses can be connected with that student. Students are informed that they may also skip any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering or that they do not understand. They are also informed that if they have any questions or concerns after taking the survey, they can talk with their school counselor or a trusted adult. Research shows asking youth about these health risk behaviors does not make them more likely to engage in that behavior.



PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

Can I see the 2025 PAYS survey questions?

A copy of the questions on the 2025 PAYS can be requested on this website:

<https://epis.psu.edu/paysquestion>

What if a parent does not wish their child to participate?

School PAYS Coordinators will be working with schools to distribute passive parental consent forms (or active consent forms in the event a school chooses that approach). Passive parental consent forms will inform parents and caregivers about the survey and instruct them to contact the principal's office to opt their child out of participating in the survey. The School PAYS Coordinator will ensure that students who do not have parental or caregiver permission will not take the survey.

If a parent does decline, their child will be allowed to read or participate in some other alternate activity while their classmates are taking the survey. If a school district or school chooses to gather active parental consent, School PAYS Coordinators will work with each school to ensure that parental consent forms are received and that only students with parental consent are given the survey.

Contact your local school district or school for more information about specific consent policies and procedures.

What will students be asked to do?

The students will be asked to complete a self-administered survey questionnaire during one class period at school, either via paper and pencil or electronically online, as chosen by their school. The student will be asked to read each question and select the answer that most closely matches the way they feel. All questions are self-reported, and no student information can be identified from the completed surveys. PAYS is also available in a Spanish language version. Schools can request copies of the Spanish version from the vendor, Bach-Harrison.



PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

How long does it take to complete PAYS?

The survey will take approximately 40 minutes to complete and is designed to be administered during a single class period. Although it is expected that the students will have sufficient time to complete the entire survey, they will be informed that they should answer as many questions as possible during the class, but not be concerned if they are not able to finish all of them.

When will PAYS be conducted?

The survey will be administered from **September 2, 2025, through December 22, 2025**, at a time chosen by each local school district and/or school. Within a given school, the survey should be administered to all participating classes during the same class period when possible. This will help prevent students from discussing the questions with classmates who have not completed the survey and from biasing the results.

How does the School PAYS Coordinator help with the survey?

The School PAYS Coordinator, whom each school's superintendent selects, will work with school principals to set an appropriate and convenient survey date, develop a passive parental consent process, and distribute and then collect survey materials. The Coordinator can be a school official or a community prevention partner. Schools that have worked with a community or county partner to facilitate PAYS in past administrations are strongly encouraged to do so again.

What will schools be asked to do?

The survey will be administered in the classroom setting by school staff or a community prevention partner. Administration protocol will be decided by each individual School Entity. Bach Harrison will provide each school with the necessary materials for completing the survey, including proctoring instructions and a standardized proctor video. This video will ensure all students hear and see the same message, which clearly explains the purpose of the survey and emphasizes its voluntary and confidential nature.



PAYS Frequently Asked Questions

How will the results be made available?

Summary Reports containing local data will be generated at the state, county, and school levels. School-level reports will be provided to the school district superintendent/senior administrator in hard copy and electronic formats no later than April 30, 2026. State and county level reports will be available on the PAYS website at www.pays.pa.gov. The statewide and county-level reports will contain only aggregate information; individual district results will not be listed separately in these reports.

How can my school and community benefit from this survey?

PAYS is a holistic approach to learning about students' attitudes and behaviors that represents the entirety of a student's environment – the community, their school, their family, and their peers/self. Information gained from participating in the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) allows schools, districts, and communities to receive detailed reports (as described above), and also provide the community with a wealth of data to be used for grant writing, program and school safety planning, as well as targeting interventions to meet a school's and community's specific needs. The survey provides information that can be used to identify the incidence of various health risk behaviors. Additionally, by tracking data over multiple PAYS administrations, prevention planners can assess the impact of programs and services over time. Results of the survey are used to determine the need for prevention services and services to support youth in achieving academic and personal goals.

QUESTIONS AND REGISTRATION

If you have any questions, please visit <http://www.pays.pa.gov/> . If you need additional information about PAYS, please contact Alise Barr, PAYS Support & Development Specialist, at arh184@psu.edu.

To register to participate in the 2025 PAYS, please contact your Bach Harrison Support Team at payssupport@bach-harrison.com.

Team Members providing support include: Katie Poppler, Jennie Coleman and Rachel Ortega



PAYS Jr. Frequently Asked Questions

What is the PAYS Jr.?

The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) Jr. is a new biennial survey of youth in the 4th grade. PAYS Jr. is a different survey from the PAYS for grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 and will be available to all districts and schools with 4th-grade students in 2025. PAYS Jr. still asks questions about students' perspectives, but excludes age-inappropriate questions like behaviors concerning alcohol, tobacco, other drugs (ATOD), violence, and other health risk behaviors. The survey covers protective factors, such as resiliency and mental health, sleep, food insecurity, school climate and safety, bullying, and screen time/social media use.

PAYS Jr. was first piloted in 2021 with 19 Pennsylvania schools, expanding to 149 schools in 2023. The 2025 version has been significantly shortened, simplified for age-appropriate reading levels, and revised to better align with Pennsylvania schools' needs.

How is the PAYS Jr. administration different from the main PAYS?

The PAYS Jr. is specific to 4th-grade students in the Pennsylvania Commonwealth. PAYS Jr. is available only online, featuring a read-aloud audio option to support student comprehension and simplify administration for teachers. This is a 25-minute survey.

Does the Survey Coordinator plan PAYS Jr. as well?

Yes, the designated survey can coordinate both PAYS and PAYS Jr.

The School PAYS Coordinator, who is selected by each school's superintendent, will work with school principals to set an appropriate and convenient survey date, develop a passive parental consent process, and distribute and then collect survey materials.