



GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

344 Main Street Groton, Massachusetts 01450

978-448-5505 • www.gdrsd.org

March 1, 2021

Dear Families,

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) recommends that Districts engage in local Needs Assessments to assist in identifying targets for health and wellness initiatives. Through collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Emerson Hospital and selected surrounding communities, our district will be administering the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to students in Grades 6 and 8 on Wednesday, March 9th, and Grades 9 to 12 on Friday, March 11th.

This year's survey should take less than 20 minutes to complete. Students will be taking the surveys on a secure website provided by Market Street Research. The surveys are anonymous and voluntary. Our survey process this year has been modified significantly in response to family feedback. In addition, the questions within the survey have also been significantly modified in response to family feedback and the onset of the pandemic.

The surveys collect information regarding at-risk behaviors. Data from the surveys will be compiled to assist the Groton Regional School District in planning future adolescent health and wellness initiatives. For more information about the survey, please refer to the Frequently Asked Question information below. For parents/guardians interested in previewing the 2022 survey before the administration dates, go to <https://marketstreetresearch.com/yrbs-survey-2022-a/>

This link is specific to Groton-Dunstable. The link will bring you to a dedicated page on Market Street Research's website. On this page are FAQs about the survey and then another link to "take" the survey. Data from these entries will not be kept. **The ability to preview the survey from this page is good through the end of day on March 6th.**

Participation in this anonymous survey is voluntary. **Parents/guardians may choose to exempt their student from participation, by completing the [Opt Out Form](#) by March 8th at 12:00pm.** Students may also choose to opt out of taking the survey or if taking the survey, they may choose not to answer specific questions.

If you have additional questions, please contact Jill Greene, Director of Student Services, at jgreene@gdrsd.org. Thank you for your support in this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Jill Greene
Director of Student Services

Emerson Hospital - Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2022

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Why does Emerson Hospital sponsor the Youth Risk Behavior Survey?**

The Emerson Hospital Community Benefits Program has a strong track record of developing collaborative efforts with the communities it serves. Emerson has carried out a comprehensive community health needs assessment, developed partnerships with different groups to address public health issues and leveraged other resources. Begun in 1997, Emerson is now partnering with eight school districts to develop and implement the Emerson Hospital YRBS as a means of improving the health status of young people in our community.

2. **What topics are covered in the 2022 Youth Risk Behavior Survey?**

- Whether students have trusted adults they can talk to if they have problems
- Resilience – are students able to manage challenge they face
- Bullying, cyberbullying, and sexual harassment
- Students' use of technology, social media, cell phones, etc.
- Major stressors in students' lives and how they manage stress
- Depression, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts
- Use of alcohol and other substances
- Sexual activity
- Body image
- Time spent on homework, on social media, and the internet

3. **Can parents/guardians see the survey before it is administered?**

Yes, absolutely. We will be sharing a link so parents/guardians can preview the survey by March 1st.

It is also possible to review reports from previous YRBS studies on Emerson Hospital's website at:

<https://www.emersonhospital.org/community-programs/youth-risk-behavior-survey>

4. **Do students have to take the survey? Can parents exempt their students from the survey?**

Yes. Parents/guardians may request to have their student exempt from taking the survey. We will be sharing a link to an opt-out form on March 1st.

Students can also decide not to take the survey on the day it happens, and even when they are taking the survey, they always have the option of not answering questions if they don't want to.

5. Will the survey questions encourage students to engage in the behaviors?

Research by the Massachusetts and federal YRBS consistently shows that asking questions on a survey such as this do not encourage or increase the likelihood that a student will engage in risky behaviors. Research also indicates that teaching and talking about risky behaviors does not result in engaging in those behaviors—in fact, it reduces students' likelihood of engaging in those behaviors. The survey is designed so that students always have the option to report that they do not participate in a particular behavior.

6. How is the survey data used?

The data provides the school district and the community with a profile of healthy and risky behaviors. The data are used to inform the health education curriculum in the school district and can be used to develop community-based prevention and intervention initiatives, including parent education and involvement.

7. How is the information reported (e.g. grade level, gender)?

A survey consultant, Market Street Research, Inc., compiles and analyzes the data. The aggregate data is first shared with the community-at-large by Emerson Hospital. Individual community data is then shared with school officials in multiple formats, including by grade level, by gender, and behavior over time.

8. How is the survey administered?

School districts conduct the survey (taking roughly 20 minutes or less) during the second week in March. Students complete the survey electronically. Typically a district selects one day during that week, and where possible, other districts will choose the same day and time. This helps minimize discussion about the survey, which might affect results. Teachers administering the survey have a script so that all students have the same directions about taking the survey. Teachers are also asked to refrain from answering questions about the survey and its content. This allows us to measure as objectively as possible.

9. Do all students take the survey or just a small sample?

All students in grades 6, 8, and 9 through 12 take the survey unless they have been excluded because of a parent's request, absence from school, or choose not to participate. Because we survey all students and not a sample, the validity of the survey is increased.

10. Is the YRBS confidential? How is a student's privacy ensured?

The YRBS is an anonymous survey and we take student confidentiality very seriously. Students who take the survey are provided anonymous online access to it and teachers are instructed not to observe or help students who are taking the survey in any way. We do not collect any identifying information from students, such as names, ID numbers or who their teachers are. We do ask general questions about student characteristics, such as how old they are and their gender, so that we can break the results down by groups—for example, students in 6th grade typically report different behaviors than students in 12th grade, and male and female students experience some of the behaviors we look at in the YRBS differently. However, there is no way for us to identify individual students from the data we collect from them.

In addition, neither Emerson Hospital nor the school districts participating in the YRBS receive the raw data from the survey. The survey consultant, Market Street Research, prepares summary reports that are presented to the districts and the community once the survey is complete.

11. How do you know that the students are being truthful when taking the survey?

By comparing our survey results to the Massachusetts and federal YRBS and tracking responses over time, we are confident about the general honesty of students who respond to the survey. Further, many steps are put in place to minimize error. All administering teachers read the same instructions to students and do not answer student questions about the survey while it is being administered. All students in each school take the survey on the same day and at the same time whenever possible. Additionally, the surveys are reviewed before they are processed and surveys that are clearly not accurate (e.g. same response circled for every question) are removed. Both the state and the Emerson YRBS survey are based on a model from the Federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which has proven to be statistically valid. Finally, research indicates that anonymous, self-reported data provides an accurate picture of behavior.