

# **Utah Student Health and Risk Prevention (SHARP) Survey Project**

## **Frequently Asked Questions Sheet**

### **Conducted by**

Utah State Office of Education, Utah Department of Health,  
and Utah Department of Human Services, Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Bach Harrison, L.L.C.

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The Utah State Office of Education, Department of Health, and Department of Human Services are conducting the seventh administration of the SHARP Survey Project. Students throughout Utah will be asked to complete one of two SHARP Survey questionnaires which include the Prevention Needs Assessment (PNA) Survey (grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 only) and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) (grades 9-12 only). The surveys measure alcohol, tobacco, and drug use; school safety, health behaviors, and students' perceptions regarding their community, school peers, and family.

The SHARP Survey Project is designed with school needs in mind and has been previously conducted throughout the State of Utah in 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2013. Before 2003, the different questionnaires were administered in Utah schools at different times. The SHARP Survey Project consolidates the efforts of the three state agencies, therefore minimizing the survey burden on schools. The SHARP Survey follows Utah State law regarding parent permission; only students who have active parent permission to take the survey are eligible to participate in the SHARP surveys.

### **What is the purpose of the SHARP survey project?**

In February-April 2015, the SHARP Survey Project will be conducted to gather information needed to plan important prevention and intervention programs to combat problems such as alcohol and other drug use and violence in schools and communities. The focus of the SHARP questionnaires is on health risk behaviors that can impede positive development and/or result in injury among our youth. The survey will also determine risk and protective factors, which are attitudes, behaviors, and opinions that research has shown to be highly predictive of health risk behaviors.

### **Who will be surveyed?**

Approximately 50,000 students will be surveyed throughout the state and approximately 250 schools will be chosen for the sample, which primarily consists of grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 for the PNA Survey, and a small random sample of roughly 3,000 youth in the 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades for the YRBS. Students in grades 6, 7, and 8 are not eligible to be part of the YRBS sample.

## What questionnaires are used in the SHARP survey project?

There are two questionnaires that will be used in the 2015 SHARP survey project – the PNA Survey and the YRBS. In previous administrations (2003, 2005, & 2007), a third Youth Tobacco Survey form was included in the SHARP process; however, the most pertinent of questions from that form were incorporated into the PNA form starting with the 2009 administration. A draft of each questionnaire scheduled to be used in the 2015 SHARP administration is included for review.

### Prevention Needs Assessment Survey

The purpose of the PNA survey is to determine students' current levels of substance abuse and antisocial behavior. In addition, the PNA assesses students' risk for future substance abuse and antisocial behavior by determining students' attitudes in four key domains: school, family, community, and peers. The information gathered with the PNA allows schools to target prevention efforts with those populations most likely to develop future substance abuse problems; it also allows prevention planners to choose appropriate programming based on areas of high risk in the community. In 2009, the SHARP Survey incorporated questions regarding tobacco use. These additional tobacco-related questions are used to increase the ability of organizations and agencies to design, implement, and evaluate tobacco control and prevention programs. ***PLEASE NOTE: There are TWO PNA forms included in this packet (Form A and Form B) – these forms will be interleaved and handed out at random to students, with each student only completing one of the forms.***

### Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

The YRBS is designed to monitor health-related behaviors that are usually established during childhood. The YRBS focuses on priority health risk behaviors established during youth that result in the most significant mortality and morbidity during both youth and adulthood. These include: behaviors that result in unintentional and intentional injuries; tobacco use; alcohol and other drug use; unhealthy dietary behaviors; and physical activity. Only students in grades 9 through 12 will take the YRBS survey.

## Why should my school participate?

By participating in this study, your school has the valuable opportunity to learn more about the needs of your students. As previously stated, the results from this project can be used to provide prevention and intervention programs to schools and communities throughout Utah. (See “Levels of Reporting Data” information at the end of this Project Information Sheet for further detail on the type of reports you will receive from SHARP participation).

## How are SHARP data used in my community?

Whether or not your district uses the survey data to complete prevention planning, to contribute to reporting or accreditation, or to secure new grants (all data use strategies employed by districts throughout the State), the data are used on a very regular basis by Local Substance Abuse Authorities, Health Departments, and Law Enforcement agencies to identify specific community needs and successes, to make funding decisions, and to determine if prevention efforts are working. The positive and impactful use of SHARP data throughout the State cannot be overstated. Districts that have chosen to make strong use of their data in prevention planning, grant writing, and reporting have benefitted immensely from that use. The SHARP Survey is intended to be of benefit to everyone. Furthermore, school counselors are using SHARP Survey data in their yearly data projects, and for planning purposes directly related to Career and College Readiness goals.

## When will the study be conducted?

The surveys will be administered during a specific week chosen by each participating school district during the months of February and April, 2015. Within a given school, the survey will be administered to all participating

classes **during the same class period** when possible. This will help avoid students discussing the questions with classmates who have not yet completed the survey and biasing the results.

## **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. Each student will receive a survey booklet that contains the survey questions. The student will be asked to read each question and select the answer in the survey booklet that most closely matches the way he/she feels.

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

Utah State law requires active parent permission be obtained for each student being surveyed, and the SHARP Survey has always respected and followed this law. Every student chosen for the sample will be given a parental consent form. Only those students who return parental consent forms that indicate that their parents agree to their participation in the SHARP surveys are allowed to take the surveys. Parents will be informed that their children's participation is voluntary and that they can decline participation if they desire. If a parent does decline, their son or daughter will be allowed to read or participate in an alternate activity while his or her classmates are taking the survey. Any student not returning a signed form will also be excluded from the surveys and given an alternate activity during the time of the survey administration.

Utah's active parent permission process protects parental rights since parents are required to actively allow or refuse survey participation. This process not only ensures that those parents who are opposed to the surveys can refuse participation; it also gives parents who are in favor of the survey project the right to allow participation and support this important prevention effort. While some parents do refuse participation, please keep in mind that throughout the State, a large majority of parents actively give their permission for the State to gather data needed to better serve their communities. During past SHARP administrations, of the signed parental consent forms returned to schools, only 2% to 4% were refusals.

## **Are incentives provided for participation?**

Students are not provided with any type of incentive for participating in the survey or returning a signed consent form (signed yes or no). There are no advantages for participating, just as there are no disadvantages for not participating. Teachers are provided with a small \$10/class incentive as a "Thank you" for their help in gathering parental consent; however, please make note that teachers receive that incentive regardless of whether or not parents return the consent forms signed "yes" or signed "no." The main focus is solely on ensuring that forms are signed and returned – the parent's decision regarding participation is of no concern to the incentive process.

## **What if a student does not wish to participate?**

After parental consent is determined, each consented student's participation in this study is also completely voluntary. At the beginning of the class period when the survey will be administered, the teacher will read a prepared statement that informs the students that their participation is voluntary. The students will be given the option to decline to participate, or to skip any question they prefer not to answer. Any student who declines participation in the survey will be provided with an alternative activity during the time period when the survey is being administered.

## **Is student participation anonymous?**

Yes, completely. The survey booklet will not have the student's name, or any other identifying information on it. Before the survey administration begins students will be reminded that they should not write their name or

other identifying information on the booklet. Before taking the survey, students will be arranged in the classroom so that their responses cannot be seen by the teacher administering the survey or their peers. At the end of the class period, the survey booklets will immediately be gathered, placed in a box, sealed and mailed to Bach Harrison, L.L.C. for data analysis. The survey gathers NO identifying information and there is no way to connect a student's completed survey to their identity.

### **Are sensitive questions asked?**

Each SHARP Survey administration is run through a rigorous Human Subjects Review Board process to ensure that the survey is safe, does not harm students, and protects parent and student rights at all levels. The survey questions have been designed to measure key behaviors without asking sensitive questions, although it is possible that some questions may be considered sensitive by some schools or school districts. Unless questions in the topic areas are asked honestly and straightforwardly, we cannot know the degree to which the youth in Utah engage in health risk behaviors. It is important to remember the survey is anonymous, so no student's responses will ever be able to be connected with that student.

### **Are the data gathered valid?**

Five validity checks are built into the data cleaning process to eliminate dishonest or inconsistent responses. Roughly 2-4% of completed surveys are eliminated due to these checks. Resulting data are consistent and stable.

### **Are data collected kept safe and secure?**

Bach Harrison LLC, SHARP Survey Contractor, is a respected leader in the substance abuse prevention research. Bach Harrison not only oversees the SHARP Survey data collection, but also scans completed surveys, manages and analyzes the scanned data, and produces reports. At all times, Bach Harrison maintains the highest level of security in housing SHARP data and upholds rigorous protocols for ensuring that data is shared appropriately as per the SHARP contract and without violating District/School privacy. Raw survey data is maintained in Bach Harrison's secure system, with limited staff access, so that trend data can be reported in future administrations. Scanned surveys are destroyed upon completion of each administration. To reiterate – there is absolutely no way to link a completed survey to an individual student.

### **How are survey data released?**

Data reports generated at the State and Regional (LSAA) levels are posted on the DHS, DSAMH website. The UDOH releases data at the Health District level to so that those regional programs can incorporate state-level and health district-level data into their various reports and fact sheets. School District and School reports are only released to Superintendents – and it is left to their discretion how to share that data with their principals and other key staff. In instances in which Bach Harrison receives an outside request for district/school data, Bach Harrison requires written permission from the Superintendent prior to release. No data at the district/school level is released without Superintendent permission.

**There is absolutely no way to link data back to individual students as the survey is 100% anonymous.**

### **How long does it take to complete the survey?**

The surveys will take approximately 45 minutes to complete and will 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 they should answer as many question as possible during the class but not be concerned if they are not able to finish all of them. Students who finish before the end of class will be asked to work quietly at their desks while their classmates finish.

## Levels of Reporting Data

**STATE REPORT** - The state reports will provide agencies with data to monitor how risk and protective factors, tobacco use, and health risk behaviors among students in Utah increase, decrease, or remain the same over time. The PNA Survey State Report in particular will consist of both an executive summary and detailed summary statistics on the demographics of the entire sample. State level results from the YRBS will also be made available through the Department of Health's website.

**PLANNING DISTRICT REPORTS** – Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Planning District Reports contain specific information based on the results of the PNA Survey data generated by a sample of students at the planning district region level. The data allow planning districts to apply for funding to provide more specific prevention and intervention programs to the students throughout their districts.

**SCHOOL DISTRICT REPORTS** – A School District level sample will provide each participating school district with a report containing specific information based on the results of the survey sample. The school district level data will assist school districts in using prevention dollars wisely; in planning for future prevention activities, programming, and policies; and in applying for additional funding to provide more specific prevention and intervention programs to the students throughout the district.

**INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL REPORTS (OVERSAMPLE)** - If school districts or communities would like to survey additional students to provide reports at the school or community level, they will have the opportunity to increase the sample in their district. Since the main costs of conducting the survey are covered by the Department of Health, the Department of Human Services, and the Office of Education, the costs to schools wanting to increase samples will be minimal. Additionally, some planning districts, and health districts may be interested in funding all or part of extra sampling costs. Contact Project Director Mary Johnston at Bach Harrison (801-842-2682) to discuss extra surveys for your district or school.

Information gained from an increased sample would not only allow schools and communities to receive more detailed reports, but would 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 specialized needs. Those who receive the information may choose to share it with other community organizations that are working on prevention projects.

Further, information gathered through the SHARP Project can be used for state and federal level Title IV Basic and Discretionary funds, School Safety Grants, Drug Free Communities Grants, and Safe Schools and other competitive funding processes.

## What is required of the school district, school, and survey coordinator?

**SCHOOL DISTRICT** - Work with the survey coordinator to determine a week the survey will be administered throughout the district. Bach Harrison is responsible for conducting the survey for the school district and will provide each school with all necessary materials for completing the survey. If you choose to participate, all active parental consent materials will be sent to the survey coordinator at least one month prior to the date of the administration when possible and all survey administration materials will be sent to the survey coordinator a minimum of two weeks prior to the date of administration.

**SCHOOL** - The survey will be administered in a school classroom setting by the class teacher. The survey coordinator will assist the teachers in obtaining and tracking parental permission, as well as administering the survey. We are asking teachers at each school to help distribute the permission letters to the parents at least two weeks before the survey date for the school. This letter will inform parents of their right to view samples of the survey questionnaires. The school principal is asked to keep the survey questionnaires on file in the school office.

**SURVEY COORDINATOR** - A paid survey coordinator from each district will work with the SHARP Project Coordinator at Bach Harrison to help facilitate the survey at the school level. Some of the responsibilities of the survey coordinator will be to work with the district to choose the survey week, work with school principals to set an appropriate and convenient survey date, work with teachers to obtain and track parental consent, and administer the survey.

**If you have any questions about this important survey, you can contact either:**

Project Director Mary VanLeeuwen Johnstun at (801)842-2682 or [mary@bach-harrison.com](mailto:mary@bach-harrison.com)

Or Project Coordinators David Dunn at 801-359-2064 ext 111 or [david@bach-harrison.com](mailto:david@bach-harrison.com)

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