

Minnesota Student Survey Tip Sheet: Confidentiality

The Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) is the primary source of comprehensive data on young people at the state, county, and local level in Minnesota and is the only consistent source of statewide data on their health and well-being. It provides valuable information about issues vital to the health, safety, and academic success of young people. The survey is voluntary, confidential, and anonymous on the part of students.

Tips for assuring students about confidentiality

This survey asks many questions, including those on sensitive topics such as family experiences, substance use, sexual health (high school only), feelings of safety, and more. Students may have concerns about whether their responses will be confidential, especially if they have been told that their web activities on school-issued devices can be tracked. Here are some tips for providing assurances:

- Remind students **that the survey is anonymous**, and let them know that they will not be asked to enter their name, identification number, or any other identifying information.
- Assure students that their **individual responses cannot be seen by any school staff**. The people who will see the responses are *not* school staff. They will add up all the responses and nobody will know which responses are yours or how you answered. Even if a school tracks web activity, this does not give the school access to a student's individual responses or any identifying information. Web IP addresses will not be traced or connected to students' computers or tablets for this survey.
- **All students from the same grade level and school will use the same URL**. The number in the URL is associated with the school name only.
- The survey asks students to identify their race, ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Let students know that **results will not be reported to schools by these demographics unless there are a large enough number of students in specific demographic groups to ensure confidentiality**. Also, remind students they can skip any questions they don't want to answer.
- **Space students apart** so that individual responses cannot be seen by other students.
- **Avoid walking around** the room so that students don't feel like their responses might be seen.
- The web survey will **"time out" after 2 minutes of inactivity. This will help prevent other students from seeing someone's responses** if they step away from the computer briefly. To restart where they left off, the student will have to re-enter the survey URL and select 'I have already started the survey and want to continue.' The student will then need to enter the access code they are given at the beginning of the survey to restart where they left off. The access code is a computer generated number and is a way for students to continue the survey. It is not linked to any identifying student information.
- Students have the option to open the survey in **"Incognito Mode."** Incognito mode does not show up in the browser history, which means people who use that same device won't see that student's activity. Specifically, it does not save anything in the browsing history, cookies, site data, or information entered in forms (for example, if the student ended up needing to use their access code to reenter the survey more than once). To open an Incognito window, use the keyboard shortcut combination Ctrl-Shift-N (Windows) or Command-Shift-N (Mac).

Resources

Help with survey administration

If you have questions or need help, please contact:

- Minnesota Department of Education: mde.studentsurvey@state.mn.us
- Wilder Research: mss@wilder.org or 651-280-2791
- Find survey instruments, survey administration instructions, parent notification letters, tip sheets and more: [MN Student Survey website](http://mnstudentsurvey.org) (<http://mnstudentsurvey.org>)

Help for students who have a heightened response to some survey questions

- **Know what resources are available on-site.** This may be a guidance counselor, school social worker, school nurse, or other on-site adult the student has a close relationship with.
- **Refer to the student resource sheet.** Share this sheet with students as needed. [Student Crisis Resource Handout](http://mnstudentsurvey.org/assets/Student-Crisis-Resource-Handout-MDE085582.pdf) (<http://mnstudentsurvey.org/assets/Student-Crisis-Resource-Handout-MDE085582.pdf>)
- **Refer to [Minnesota Student Survey Tip Sheet: Trauma-Informed Survey Administration](http://mnstudentsurvey.org/assets/MSS_TipSheet_TraumaInformed_12-1-21.pdf)** (http://mnstudentsurvey.org/assets/MSS_TipSheet_TraumaInformed_12-1-21.pdf)