

Do Students Tell the Truth on the Prevention Needs Assessment (PNA)?*

The honesty of survey respondents is always a concern in survey research. The PNA uses a variety of procedures to encourage students to respond honestly. In addition there are procedures in place to help detect and correct for some dishonesty in survey responses. Based on these procedures as well as other evidence explained below, it appears that the vast majority of students answer the PNA openly and honestly. As a result, we are confident that the data from the PNA can be relied upon as an accurate picture of Wyoming's students.

Procedures to Encourage Honesty

Survey environment. The survey administration procedures are designed to foster an environment in which students feel that they can respond honestly. The procedures promote the anonymity of students' responses and the confidentiality of the schools' data. The instructions given to the students encourage open and honest responses. The procedures include:

- Assigning the students to sit as far apart as possible throughout the classroom.
- Restricting the teachers and/or survey administrators to remain in a location in the classroom from which they cannot observe the students' responses.
- Designating a central collection box or envelope in the classroom where the students themselves place the surveys. Teachers will inform students that the collection box or envelope will be sealed immediately at the end of the surveying period so that no one in the school can gain access and associate any questionnaire with a specific person.
- Telling the students about the importance of providing honest answers. Teachers will tell students that their answers will help improve programs and policies for students.

Questionnaire design and content. The PNA questionnaire is designed to protect the anonymity of the students. Each question is also designed to be easily understood and answered.

- No names or other types of personally identifying information are ever requested. Students are instructed not to put any identifying marks on the questionnaire.
- No skip patterns are used on the questionnaire (e.g., "if you answer 'yes' to question 7, skip to question 105"). Every student is asked to answer all the questions. This helps to ensure that all the students complete the questionnaire in approximately the same amount of time.
- To help students accurately understand and respond to the survey questions, the questionnaire is written for the 7th grade reading level. Questions are also written in a straightforward and direct manner and almost never require the student to choose more than one response from the answers provided.
- The survey has been tested to make sure that it can be completed in a single classroom period.
- The survey has several built in honesty measures that can be used in later analysis to help detect if a student may not have responded honestly to the questionnaire.

* This document is modeled after a similar document authored by the Wyoming Department of Education titled "Do students tell the truth on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)?".

Edit Checks. The original survey developers instituted a series of dishonesty criteria to identify surveys where the student's responses appear to be highly exaggerated or where the student admits to being completely dishonest. Surveys that meet these criteria are excluded from the analysis. In previous years, seven percent or less of the returned surveys met these honesty criteria. For more information about Wyoming PNA honesty measures, please contact WYSAC's principal investigator for this project.

Evidence for Honest Responding

Logic within groups of questions. Questions with similar topics often have a logical relationship that would be expected if the students were responding honestly to the survey. For example, more students would be expected to admit to having tried cigarettes during their lifetime than the number of students who have used cigarettes during the past thirty days, and even fewer students would be expected to admit having smoked more than half a pack of cigarettes per day during the last 30 days. In almost every case these logical patterns were validated during all the past PNA administrations. Students with a large number of logically inconsistent responses are excluded from analysis.

Comparison of PNA results with results from other surveys. When PNA results are compared to results from other national, state, and local surveys on the same topics, the results are generally quite similar. This is especially evident when differences in survey administration, sample selection, question wording and analysis methods are taken into consideration.

Psychometric studies. In 2002 a set of researchers from the University of Washington published a scientific paper explaining the development and psychometric testing of the core survey questions used in the PNA (Arthur, Hawkins, Pollard, Catalano & Baglioni, 2002). The development included using and modifying established survey measures for key attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that have been shown in scientific literature to increase or decrease the odds that youth will use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs or exhibit other problem behaviors. These survey questions were tested and refined until a survey instrument was developed that could be administered in a single 45 minute class period to 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students. The survey questions demonstrated adequate reliability and validity with regard to predicting youth substance use. Further studies (Glaser, Van Horn, Arthur, Hawkins & Catalano, 2005) have found that the core survey questions seem to measure similar attitudinal and behavioral constructs across five different race and ethnic groups and for both genders. Overall, these studies indicate that students respond to the PNA with enough honesty that it does not generally threaten the reliability and validity of the survey results.

References

- Arthur, M. W., Hawkins, J. D., Pollard, J. A., Catalano, R. F., & Baglioni, A. J. (2002). Measuring risk and protective factors for substance use, delinquency, and other adolescent problem behaviors: The Communities That Care Youth Survey. *Evaluation Review, 26*(6), 575-601.
- Glaser, R. R., Van Horn, M. L., Arthur, M. W., Hawkins, J. D., & Catalano, R. F. (2005). Measurement Properties of the Communities That Care Youth Survey Across Demographic Groups. *Journal of Quantitative Psychology, 21*(1), 73-102.