

Alaska State Legislature

Interim: (May - Dec.)
716 W. 4th Ave
Anchorage, AK 99501
Phone: (907) 269-0144
Fax: (907) 269-0148



Session: (Jan. - May)
State Capitol, Suite 30
Juneau, AK 99801-1182
Phone: (907) 465-3822
Fax: (907) 465-3756
Toll free: (800) 770-3822

Senator_Bettye_Davis@legis.state.ak.us
<http://www.akdemocrats.org>

Senator Bettye Davis

SB 8 - "An Act relating to questionnaires and surveys administered in the public schools."

Sponsor Statement

The purpose of this bill is to increase participation in the national biennial Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in order to meet the minimum 60% participation required by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for the survey to be validated for assessment, recording and reporting of reliable results. Alaska has periodically failed to meet minimum participation levels. This anonymous survey will next be administered in Alaska School Districts in Spring 2011 and 2013. This survey is enormously valuable to all aspects of society dealing with our youth. Failure to obtain usable information adversely affects education and funding of many services.

To help achieve this objective this bill will change the parental consent requirement for the YRBS from active to passive, that is, from written to implied consent if the parent does not object or deny permission in writing for the student to participate in the survey. To alleviate increased concerns about protecting the right to privacy the bill provides lengthy and detailed new notice requirements which will be sent to parents at least two weeks in advance of the survey. There will be ample time and opportunity for parents to review the survey with instructions on how to opt out. Students may also independently decline to participate or to answer specific questions in this completely voluntary and anonymous survey. Absolute privacy and anonymity are maintained by strict administrative procedures and return of surveys to CDC. Written permission is still required to be obtained from the student's parent or legal guardian for all other surveys, anonymous or not that inquire into personal or private family affairs of the student and not a matter of public record or subject to public observation.

Although research and experience suggest that the vast majority of parents would consent to their students participating in this survey, failure of parents to return written consent forms has been found more often to be the result of lack of interest or attention, rather than refusal. Consequently, results from whole schools periodically must be disregarded when not enough parental consent forms are returned.

Without facts and population-based information on youth risk behavior parents, students, educators, planners, and policy makers cannot understand and address the important health and social issues that affect students' happiness and success in the future. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey helps guide and evaluate important health and prevention programs in both the public and private sectors. Local, state and federal officials, schools, state and federal agencies, public and private grant programs and nonprofit health organizations rely on these surveys to educate, allocate resources, and compare trends concerning safety behaviors, injury prevention, tobacco prevention and control, obesity prevention, diabetes, heart disease and stroke, safe and drug free schools, substance abuse prevention, violence and suicide prevention, HIV, STD prevention, and connectedness to teachers, parents and other adults. SB 8 simply makes it easier to obtain information on youth risk behaviors, while increasing procedures to assure privacy, parental notice, and supervision.