

Tips for Raising Participation Rates

Consent types

Since 2004 districts have had the choice of using Passive ('opt out') consent for the CHKS. Previously all consents have been Active.

Passive consent is generally viewed as a way of increasing participation rates as the default is for students to take the survey unless they return a signed consent from parents/guardians that states that they do not wish their child to take part.

This is only an option for grades 7 and up. Grade 5 must use Active consent.

LEA's are welcome to use Passive consent as long as they have a board policy in place regarding the use of Passive consent. However with Passive LEAs must make sure that all parents/guardians are fully informed of the survey, opt out options and the administration date.

Many of the tips suggested for LEAs using Passive consent are also good tips for all districts and schools wishing to raise participation.

For a detailed list of the pros and cons of active and passive consent go to Guidebook 1 available via the Tools tab at www.wested.org/chks

Why is parent consent important?

The California Department of Education asks schools to aim for minimum student participation rate of between 60–70% for the results to be considered representative. Obviously the closer schools can get to 100% the more valid and representative are the results.

The CHKS asks questions about both resilience and risk taking behavior. Parents must be made aware of the survey and its questions so that they can decide whether or not they wish their child to participate. In some cases this may be the first time these questions have been raised and students/children may have additional questions for their teachers/parents (guardians).

Tips

- Teachers are key
- Spread the word widely
- Empower the students

Teachers are key

According to districts, the critical factor in securing high return rates is gaining the support of teachers and school administration. It is the teacher and other school staff who have to take on the primary responsibilities for obtaining consent, track which parents have returned the forms and which have not. Their role in making sure you achieve your targeted response rate is critical. They are also the survey representatives to parents – the people they turn to for answers to questions.

Praise the teachers

Thank them for their support during administration time. Let them know how important they are obtaining quality results, and how important are quality results.

Use your most recent CHKS results to foster support

Share the most recent CHKS results, and any changes that have come about as a result across the district, with staff.

Communicate well

Answer questions from school staff in a timely manner. Offer to field parent inquiries or print consent forms for teachers so they don't have to. Talk to superintendents, principals, teachers during meetings to ask for their support.

Develop key contacts

Have a contact person at each school site to help define roles, responsibilities and foster school-level ownership of the survey and their results. Site coordinators should help monitor consents and help with problem classes or teachers.

Add a personal touch

Face-to-face interactions are valuable for fostering support. If possible, meet with each teacher to discuss the importance of the survey. Be available to help explain the survey to students and pass out consent forms.

Customize the consent package

LEAs should feel free to add letters of encouragement or letters from districts administration that support the use of the survey. Provide schools with a list of changes that have occurred as a result of the survey and convey this to staff and parents.

Stress the links between health, connectedness and academics

Teachers are often concerned about loss of classroom instruction time (1 class period) to administer the survey. Make sure that staff are aware of the research that links health, connectedness and protective factors, and low levels of risk-taking behavior to academic achievement. Share with them the results of the analysis of the relationship between CHKS indicators and the state Academic Performance Index, available on the CHKS website (www.wested.org/chks and click on 'Research')

Spread the word widely

Registration packages

The most recommended strategy for increasing consent form return rates is to place the consent forms in registration packets. Many districts and schools place consents and information in packages at the start of each year.

On display

Put copies of the surveys at the Front Office so staff, parents/guardians can view the survey.

Websites

Provide information about the survey including copies, dates for administration and the CHKS Website (www.wested.org/chks) onto the district and school website.

Administration

Talk to the school administration about the survey, its uses and benefits. Schools conduct many surveys and tests these days and having a supportive administration often makes the whole process easier. Discuss ways that schools can make the CHKS processes smooth and encourage ownership of the survey and its results.

Other

Provide information in languages spoken by the community; and arrange a contact person and/or an information session about the survey for the community.

Empower the students

Student influence in their school

If students believe that the results have an effect upon their school, its policies and practices they are more likely to participate.

Some schools provide 'incentives' for students to participate but the best encouragement and method for increasing participation is 'ownership' and 'meaning'.

Ongoing discussion

The results from the CHKS are a great lead-in to fostering or continuing discussions with students about their school and community. This could be focus groups, employing school newspaper journalists to do follow-up articles/surveys, as well as via student council or other student-staff-parents discussion groups. For ideas and examples have a look over the workshops run by Bonnie Benard, www.wested.org/resilience

'School community'

Many schools have used these discussions to make key changes to school policy, infrastructure, with regards to academics, student safety, after-school activities, counseling and landscaping, among other things.

It is a great tool to insure that all members of the school community have an active say and ownership in the school, its policies and activities.

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