

Testimony
Senate Bill No. 2105
Chairperson Representative Heinert
House Education Committee
March 12, 2025
Rolette County Public Health District

Good morning, Chairperson Heinert, and members of the House Education Committee Services.

My name is Barbara Frydenlund, I am a Registered Nurse and the administrator of Rolette County Public Health. Rolette County Public Health District serves Rolette County located in District 9.

I stand before you in opposition to SB 2105 as it relates to the administration of surveys to students in North Dakota K-12 schools.

As a public health administrator, I am concerned about the impact that this legislation would have on student surveys conducted every other year through collaboration with the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services and local public health program specific surveys. These surveys include but not limited to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and the Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS).

Such legislation would block the administration of these surveys and have a detrimental effect on the understanding of the health needs and concerns of students. There is little to no local or state youth related data available within North Dakota in the absence of these surveys. Local data is needed as supporting documentation in the pursuit of state, federal and local grant opportunities.

These surveys are conducted anonymously, through a non – identifying means. The information collected from school-based surveys assist school staff and specifically health entities to develop health and education plans, curriculums, and programs best suited to address the concerns most relevant to the youth of the school, region, or the state of North Dakota. Without research most plans are ineffective and a waste to resources.

Information received from assessment, whether scholastic or health assist school administration in educating parents regarding the collaborative behaviors of students. Often parents are unaware of behavior trends amongst youth. An example of this can be the challenges that are copycat from social media, detrimental to our youth and many parents/guardians are oblivious to.

It has been my experience that schools are diligent in posting surveys on websites, apps etc. providing parents/guardians the opportunity to review the content prior to the administration of the survey and giving them the opportunity to opt out of the survey. These surveys are not funded by the United States Department of Education, so active parental consent is not required. Participation in the surveys is voluntary. However, to develop accurate estimates of health risk behaviors among adolescents, participation rates must be high.

Parental consents are increasingly difficult to obtain despite the options for paper or electronic submissions. Lives are busy! Health units spent an extraordinarily large amount of time ensuring parents are informed, have options for submitting consents and spend countless hours and resources calling parents to remind them and often parents prefer to provide verbal consent and express appreciation for the contact. I am aware of public health and school staff going the extra mile to complete all the demographics on a consent form leaving the parents with only the responsibility of signing their name and filling in a half dozen health screening questions if the consent is related to immunizations. Obtaining consents and gaining parental involvement is not like it was 10, 20, 30, 40 + years ago.

As a Registered Nurse working in the world of prevention, a mother, and the wife of a school superintendent I quickly learned the if you genuinely want to know the concerns and needs of a student's....ask

the students! Allow the students to be part of the solution, most adults do not give our youth enough credit for their insight and the great ideas that they can contribute to alleviating negative behaviors.

The entire reason for these school-based surveys is to identify ways to help our youth as they navigate an extraordinarily complex world created by adults.

Youth tend to be very honest when completing surveys when they know they can not be identified or when talking with a trusted adult with whom they have built a mutual respectful relationship with. Over and over, I have seen these relationships flourish between youth and our nursing staff. There truly is a reason nurses are considered to be the most trusted profession for the past 23 years.

A few years ago, my health district conducted a youth wellness survey to sophomore students. Parents were informed of the survey content, the day of administration, the opportunity to opt out and that a summary of positive and negative concerns would be returned to the student in a privacy envelope. This survey was not anonymous. I was clear to the students that this survey was not a judgement, it would provide aggregate data identifying their concerns and what health topics our agency could best provide to them. My admission was that the only questions that I would personally review were those relating to suicidal ideation/plan and that if I identified a concern, I would be back in contact with the individual student that day. If they were uncomfortable with answering any of the questions, they were free to omit them. Upon completion I did identify a student who expressed a current suicide plan. As promised, I returned to the school, involved the student, school counselor and her parent. Long story short the student

revealed this survey gave her the opportunity to reach for help to someone she saw as a trusted adult. I am happy to say this individual received the care she needed and to this day both the parent and young adult thank me for saving her life... and without that opportunity this individual does not believe that she would be alive today.

Surveys and assessments are not meant to be intrusive or burdensome but rather insightful to how we as adults can best support our youth, make the best use of the limited education resources, and provide the opportunity to shape our youth into healthy, productive, and well-adjusted adults.

Please do not make the consent process even more cumbersome.

But more importantly, please do not take away the voice of our youth and students, a voice that may be the difference between life and death.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to SB 2105.

I stand for questions.

Sincerely,

Barbara Frydenlund

Rolette County Public Health