# Federal complaints filed after Burlington middle school administers controversial youth survey despite opt-out requests



Burlington Public Schools is currently facing two federal complaints following the administration of the annual Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) at Marshall Simonds Middle School, where parents allege the district violated federal law by providing the questionnaire to students despite their explicit requests to opt out. These complaints were filed on 8 April with the US Department of Education by the Massachusetts Liberty Legal Center, a Wakefield-based organisation advocating for free speech, religious liberty, and parental rights. The legal centre submitted the complaints on behalf of parents of two middle school students.

The YRBS, which has been administered to students in grades six through twelve for over a decade in Burlington’s middle and high schools, covers a broad scope of topics ranging from sexual behaviour and mental health to substance use, bullying, discrimination, nutrition, and violence. The survey’s results contribute to a nationwide data collection initiative led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), with district-specific data included.

However, some parents raised concerns about wording changes introduced this year by a private consultant working with Burlington officials. These alterations reportedly led to the inclusion of graphic definitions of various sexual acts, which many found inappropriate for students as young as 11. For example, the middle school survey included explicit questions about engaging in oral and anal sex, accompanied by detailed descriptions, as well as queries concerning the use of sex toys “vaginal or anal.”

One of the parents involved in the complaint, Adrianne Simeone, spoke with The Boston Globe about her reaction after her eighth-grade son was administered the survey despite her objection. “I talk to my son about sex,” she said. “It’s not like it’s a foreign concept to him, but anal sex, oral sex, sex toys — no. Even though my son is in eighth grade, that’s pretty horrific to me.”

Superintendent Eric Conti declined to provide an interview but referred to a statement the school district placed on its website on Wednesday. The statement acknowledged shortcomings in the survey’s opt-out process and the delivery of proctor instructions, emphasising the importance of clear communication with families. It also made available detailed information about the survey, including copies of this year’s questions and those from previous years. “Burlington Public Schools acknowledges that during the administration of the 2025 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), there were areas for improvement, particularly in the opt-out process and delivery of the proctor script,” the statement said. “We recognise the importance of clear communication with families regarding student participation in surveys of this nature.”

The controversy over the survey emerges amid broader federal scrutiny and changes under the Trump administration, which has imposed restrictions on data related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Earlier in the year, data from youth risk surveys was removed from the CDC’s website as part of an initiative to eliminate what officials described as “gender ideology” from federal government resources. Furthermore, the administration has focused on expanding parental rights in education.

David Hanafin, father of another student central to the second federal complaint, told The Boston Globe that his concerns, as well as those of other parents, are based on personal values and parental discretion concerning the material their children encounter. He opted his son out of the survey, but the school nonetheless administered it to him. Hanafin criticised the school district’s notification process, which relied on Parent Square—an online platform used to communicate various school matters—and said many parents miss such notices amid the high volume of messages they receive daily. He further indicated that opting out does not fully insulate children from exposure, as the survey content is often discussed among students during social interactions, with some even sharing screenshots of the questions.

“The surveys are wholly inappropriate,” Hanafin said. “They push it way too early and way too much.” He expressed the view that schools should focus primarily on traditional academic subjects such as reading, writing, mathematics, history, and science.

The issue came to wider public attention shortly after the survey’s administration last month when a parent, whose child took screenshots of the questionnaire, posted them on social media to alert other parents about the nature of the questions.

Sam Whiting, legal counsel for the Massachusetts Liberty Legal Center, stated that the organisation plans to file additional complaints against Burlington schools on behalf of other concerned parents regarding both the content of the survey and the district’s failure to adequately honour opt-out requests. Speaking to The Boston Globe, Whiting remarked, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen one this graphic in the questions, and certainly we’ve never seen a school district not comply with parental opt-out.”

While the survey is conducted under federal oversight and with coordination from the state education agency, individual districts retain some discretion to modify questions to suit their student populations. The ongoing complaints highlight tensions around the administration and content of health surveys in school settings, particularly on topics of sexual behaviour, and reflect broader national debates on parental rights and student privacy.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.burlingtonpublicschools.org/district/youth_risk_behavior_survey__yrbs__> - This official Burlington Public Schools page confirms the administration of the 2025 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), acknowledges issues with the opt-out process and proctor instructions, and explains that the survey has been used in the district since 2012 with CDC oversight, supporting the claims about the survey's scope, oversight, and district response.
* <https://massinformedparents.substack.com/p/burlington-parents-opted-kids-out> - This article details the complaints by Burlington parents regarding the graphic sexual content in the YRBS survey, including explicit questions about oral and anal sex and sex toys, and the violation of parental opt-out requests, corroborating the parents’ concerns and the filing of federal complaints by Massachusetts Liberty Legal Center.
* <https://bcattv.org/burlington-parents-upset-over-youth-risk-behavior-survey/> - This source reports on the emotionally charged public comments from parents at the Burlington School Committee meeting expressing their frustration with the YRBS survey administration and the district’s communication, supporting the article’s description of public outrage and calls for accountability.
* <https://www.burlington.buzz/all/parents-call-for-accountability-after-inappropriate-survey-administered-at-school/> - This article covers the controversy over the YRBS survey's explicit content and the district’s failure to respect opt-out requests, including details on parental advocacy, school committee meetings, and the Massachusetts Liberty Legal Center’s legal actions, confirming several key points of the article.
* <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm> - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s official page on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey explains the national data collection effort, survey topics including sexual behavior and mental health, and states that states and districts can adapt questions, supporting the article’s description of the YRBS's scope and federal oversight.