



Dear Excel Academy Charter High School Parent or Guardian:

Our team of clinicians and scientists from the Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, with funding support from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, is partnering with schools across Massachusetts to improve adolescent mental health and reduce substance use, and we can't accomplish this mission without the help of you and your child! **These are not programs or research projects of the Excel Academy Charter High School.**

**Why is this program so important?** We are in the middle of a youth mental health crisis. The current generation of adolescents are facing a concerning rise in mental health concerns and substance use that far too often goes undetected or unchecked. Further, the increased need for mental health and substance use services among adolescents far exceeds the resources available at school and in the community.

We partner with schools across Massachusetts and offer therapeutic treatments and education programs for students who may be in need of some extra supports. Additionally, our program aims to discover what makes a young person particularly vulnerable to substance use and other psychiatric concerns. The information your child provides will be invaluable in not only improving our understanding of adolescent mental health and substance use, but also in helping our team develop more effective intervention, prevention, and education programs to help students and families. Previous program participants have found these types of studies to be an informative, interesting, and rewarding experience that provides unique insight on real applications of science and their own behaviors.

**Who can participate in the programs?** Students who have never used addictive substances (e.g., cannabis and nicotine), students who have used addictive substances, students who are at risk for substance use or mental health concerns, and students who are currently suffering from mental health concerns may be invited to take part in one or more of our projects. Our group places great importance on the study of both mental health concerns and substance use given the high rate of comorbidity between these two conditions.

### **What does our evaluation program involve?**

#### School-Wide Assessment:

- ✓ All 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students will complete a very brief and confidential survey about substance use and mental health.
- ✓ This will take place during the week of January 29, 2024.
- ✓ The survey will take approximately 15-30 minutes to complete. Surveys will not collect any names or contact information.
- ✓ During the survey, your student will be asked about a variety of different things. For example:
  - ✓ Basic demographics (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity)
  - ✓ Mental health (e.g., symptoms of depression, anxiety, emotion dysregulation)
  - ✓ Substance use (e.g., lifetime and current use of alcohol, cannabis, and nicotine)
  - ✓ Other descriptives used to create a unique code (i.e., it cannot be used to identify a student) for all completed surveys (e.g., eye color, hair color, first three letters of their street name in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, middle initial). These questions may be used to connect records over time, but this information will not be used to find out your students' names.
- ✓ An example of the types of questions that may appear in the survey can be found here:  
<https://redcap.link/schoolsurveytestlink>.
- ✓ For students completing the survey, they will be asked to enter their Locally Assigned Student ID number (LASID) that may be used to connect records over time, similar to the descriptor questions that create a

unique code. As neither the MGH Research Team nor schools will have the information to decipher the code, the LASIDs **cannot** be used to identify students who choose to respond to the survey. Additionally, your student's school will not have access to any of the individual survey responses.

- ✓ Students will also be given the option to ask our team for a connection to a school staff member to receive more behavioral health resources at their school. This component is **VOLUNTARY**.
  - For students who request additional resources, our team will send a designated school staff member a list of LASIDs that requested a connection.
  - Students will be informed that **ONLY** their LASID (student identification number) will be shared with the school staff member.
  - Students' survey responses will **NOT** be shared with the school in any capacity.
- ✓ If you do NOT want your student to participate in this survey, you must complete this opt-out form <https://redcap.link/idecideoptout2324> by January 28, 2024. There will be no penalty or consequence to you or your student for opting out of the survey. If the study staff does not hear from you by January 28, 2024, it will be assumed that you consent to your student completing this brief and confidential questionnaire. Even if you do not object to your student completing this survey, your student is in no way required to do it if they do not want to.

**Please indicate if you would like your student opted out of the survey by completing this short form <https://redcap.link/idecideoptout2324> by January 28, 2024.**

**What about privacy and confidentiality?** We ensure that all information provided to us remains confidential. All questionnaires, interviews, and other information provided to us will only have an identification number on them; none will have names or other identifying information. None of the information your student provides will be available to anyone, including school officials or personnel.

**How do I find out more information?** If you would like to learn more about our research program, please reach out to Dr. Randi Schuster at (617) 643-6673 or [Rschuster@mgh.harvard.edu](mailto:Rschuster@mgh.harvard.edu).

We look forward to partnering with you!

Sincerely,

Randi M. Schuster, Ph.D  
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Psychiatry Department  
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