Dear Parent/Guardian

Your child is invited to take part in a survey being conducted in our school this year. This letter and the attached information sheet summarises key information about the survey. More information can be found at [www mdi sa edu au](http://www mdi sa edu au) or can be collected from your child’s teacher.

**Purpose of the survey**
Children’s sense of wellbeing is an important part of their development. The purpose of the project is to understand how children during the middle childhood years think and feel about their lives both inside and outside of school. Students will complete a survey called the *Middle Years Development Instrument* or MDI. The information collected from the survey will help inform educational and community efforts to help improve young people’s health and wellbeing.

**What is the survey about?**
The Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) asks young people about their 1) social and emotional development; 2) feelings of connectedness to school, family, friends, and communities; 3) school experiences; 4) physical health and wellbeing; and 5) activities after school. Student’s answers to the survey will be kept confidential – no one will use the results to identify individual students.

**What is involved in project participation?**
Your child’s teacher will arrange for students to undertake the MDI survey during one or two class lessons. Your child will be asked if he or she would like to participate and is free to withdraw at any time. You may withdraw your child from the survey at any time. Choosing not to participate or withdraw will not affect your child’s education in any way.

*If you wish to remove your child’s name from the participant list please contact your child’s teacher within two weeks of receiving this letter.*

**How will young people’s information be kept confidential?**
The information that is collected from each student through the survey will be kept confidential. Confidentiality will be maintained by ensuring that:

- Information that could identify individuals, such as names and addresses, will be held separately from the responses to the MDI survey.
- The identifying information will only be used to combine the MDI data with other educational data for statistical analysis and research.
- Students’ responses to each question will be analysed only after student names and addresses are removed.
• All survey data that is made available to the school or for other reports will be for groups of students only – no individual person will be able to be identified in the results.

Will schools, classes or young people be “ranked” in any way?
No, findings will be publically presented at the community level, and no school or child will be identified. Schools will obtain confidential reports regarding their own school findings. Any information that would identify teachers or students will be removed from any reports.

Where can I get more information?
Further information can be found at www mdi sa edu au or from Karen Church588@schools sa edu au (Years 6 & 7) or Sue Richards584@schools sa edu au (Years 8 and 9).

For questions or concerns, or to view the MDI questions, please contact Anna Lewkowicz, Project Manager, via email at DECD MDI@sa gov au or Anna Lewkowicz@sa gov au or by phone at 08 8226 0452 or Betty Curzons, phone 08 8226 9144.

Sincerely,

Principal (Acting)
Reynella East College
Frequently Asked Questions

Why are we doing the Middle Years Development Instrument?
Being successful in school and in life requires more than literacy and numeracy, it also involves social and emotional wellbeing, good physical health, activities outside of school and being supported by families, schools and communities. There are a number of important questions we are seeking to answer:

- What are the ways in which we can help children experience success and feel supported during the school years?
- What do children need to lead them on a positive path to becoming caring and capable citizens of tomorrow?
- What can children tell us about what they need to give them a sense of competence in their achievements and to feel supported in their families, schools, and communities?

The answers to these questions are not yet known for children during the middle school years (Year 5 to Year 9) in Australia. What we do know is that what happens during the middle childhood years – the ages between 8 and 14 years of age – is critical and has long lasting effects. This is a time period in which important changes occur across almost every aspect of children’s lives – intellectual/cognitive changes, physical changes, and social and emotional changes. Middle childhood is also a time when children spend time outside their families with their peers, and in schools, neighbourhoods, and the larger community setting.

Researchers, with the help of educators and community members, have developed a survey called the Middle Years Development Instrument (also called the MDI) to help learn more about children’s development, engagement and wellbeing during the middle childhood years.

Teachers will support young people in your school to complete the MDI. The purpose of the survey is to understand how children think and feel about their lives both in and outside of school. The results will be used to help your child’s school, community and government to better understand what needs to be done so that all children experience success and are provided with the resources and opportunities to reach their fullest potential.

What are the benefits of the MDI?
This is one of the first surveys of its kind in Australia that obtains comprehensive information on the lives of children inside and outside of school from the children themselves. What we know is that listening to what children tell us and making their voices heard provides information that is critical for assisting parents, educators, community leaders, and researchers learn more about children during middle childhood and find ways to promote positive development for all children.

What data are collected?
The MDI asks children to answer questions about five areas of children’s development and wellbeing:
1) social and emotional development;
2) feelings of connectedness to school, family, friends, and communities;
3) school experiences,
4) physical health and well-being; and
5) time use during the after school hours.

The survey asks children questions about:
- their classrooms and school, as well as
- their perceptions of their relationships with peers, parents/guardians, and other important adults such as neighbours
• their views about their physical health
• how they spend their time after school during a typical week.

Because there are four questions on the MDI that ask your child about problems that they may be having with classmates, a form will be provided at the end of the survey that asks if your child would like to be contacted by their teacher or school counsellor for help. Your child will be asked to answer with a “yes” or “no” (if your child answers with a “yes” they will also be asked to print their name) and give the form to the teacher. If your child marks “yes” indicating that they would like help, the teacher will follow the procedures outlined by your school for assisting students.

Students will complete the MDI survey using a purpose built secure online survey tool. When the student has responded to all questions in the MDI survey and has submitted their responses, a unique MDI ID is created which links the identifying information to the completed MDI survey ensuring that the research team never sees any personal details of respondents. The identifying information will be used to link the MDI to other data, for example, education and health data to enable researchers to have a holistic view of child development. All research data used for reporting and statistical purposes for the MDI will have the names and addresses removed.

**How is the MDI done?**
The survey will be completed by your child during school hours. In most schools, the survey will be completed online. The entire survey takes children approximately two lessons to complete. On completion, surveys will be sent electronically to the Department for Education and Child Development for secure storage and analysis. Students’ names are not stored alongside the MDI survey answers themselves.

It is important to note that we are not in any way “testing” your child. We simply want to know how children are feeling and doing as well as how children understand themselves and others. Participation in the project is voluntary and your child has the right to refuse or withdraw from the project at any point before, during, or after completion of the survey. If a child chooses not to participate, his/her classroom teacher will provide an alternate activity that is related to the regular school curriculum.

**How will the data be reported?**
The MDI is a population measure. Results are reported only at a group-level, such as schools and communities. Each school will receive a report of the MDI results for their students. To protect the confidentiality of students, schools that have less than five students participate will not receive results back for their students.

**How will the MDI data be used and stored?**
Each student’s MDI information will be stored in a secure database. Personal identification data, such as Unique Identifying numbers, date of birth, and postal code are needed for data linkage purposes only. For confidentiality reasons this identification data is stored separately from the MDI data in a secure research environment. All MDI surveys will be stored by the Department for Education and Child Development on behalf of schools. Your child’s school does not keep a copy of the survey and no information is added to your child’s school record. Because the results of the study are reported at the group-level only, your child’s own specific survey information will not be made public in any way.

**Why is MDI data being linked?**
The data may be combined with other data sources in order to learn more about the factors that impact children’s well-being and sense of competence. Other data sources may include education and health information. The linked data can only be used for research or statistical purposes.