



NJ SCI Survey Administration Guidelines

For Data Coordinators

The New Jersey School Climate Improvement (NJ SCI) Survey is a comprehensive assessment tool designed to help school leaders learn more about strengths and needs in their school community. There are four versions of the NJ SCI survey: one for students in grades 3-5, one for students in grades 6-12, one for all school staff, and one for parents and caregivers (with a child/children in *any* grade level(s) in the building). Students in grades Pre-K-2 should not take the NJ SCI Survey. Student and Parent/Caregiver surveys are currently available in English, Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, Haitian Creole, and Arabic. All items are close-ended and “not applicable” options are available for select items.

The NJ SCI survey is anonymous, and participation is voluntary for all groups. Individuals may decide not to take the survey or may skip some or all items on the survey. No respondent should feel pressured to participate in the survey if they do not want to. Assignments and/or incentives should not be used to encourage individuals to take the survey. It is important that students understand that participation in the survey is their choice and that their decision will not affect their grades. Additionally, students should be reminded that they can skip any question on the survey that they are not comfortable answering, including questions about their background (*See Step 2*).

The SCTP believes it is best practice for schools to notify parents and caregivers about students’ participation in school climate surveys. New Jersey currently has statutory law with respect to active parental consent (*N.J.S.A. 18A:36-34*) and passive parental consent (*N.J.S.A. 18A:36-34.1*). Please be advised that some items on the student surveys may require that schools conduct a passive consent process in accordance with these laws. While the administration guidelines provided include examples of suggested language for communicating with parents and caregivers about the survey and facilitating the passive consent process, it is the district’s and school’s sole responsibility to comply with any and all laws with respect to the administration of the NJ SCI Survey. As stated in the Terms of Use signed by your district’s Superintendent/Chief School Administrator, your district/school should consult its local board and counsel for guidance on compliance with all applicable laws and policies relating to parental consent for surveys.

The NJ SCI Survey is administered electronically via the New Jersey School Climate Improvement (NJ SCI) Platform. While there is no restriction on the number of times a school can deploy surveys in a school year, one well-executed survey administration with ample participation is typically sufficient to facilitate the process of identifying needs and setting goals for strategic planning. Subsequent survey administrations should be planned

thoughtfully with sufficient time elapsed between them for interventions to have a measurable impact. **It is not recommended that schools administer the NJ SCI Survey more than twice per year** to avoid respondent fatigue and to maximize the likelihood that school and district-level teams have time to use the data effectively.

Data Coordinators, Team Champions (principals) and Team Chairs should carefully review the guidelines below and view the companion [Overview of NJ SCI Survey Administration](#) Learning Module in preparation for NJ SCI Survey administration. Additionally, view the [Screencast Tutorial of NJ SCI Survey Deployment](#) for step-by-step instructions on how to deploy a survey on the platform. After reviewing these materials, draft an initial plan for survey administration using the steps below, and communicate with other members of the School Climate Leadership Team to overview logistics for administration and provide an opportunity for feedback and questions. See the [Planning for NJ SCI Survey Administration](#) activity for facilitating a team meeting to discuss survey administration.

In multi-school districts, the School Principals/Team Champions, and Team Chairs should consult with the District Climate Coordinator (DCC) to learn of any district-wide coordination plans before conducting school level planning for survey administration. A planning activity is available for members of the District Climate Leadership Team on their district site to help determine if survey administration will be coordinated district-wide, as is recommended. If you have questions or concerns, reach out to staff at the School Climate Transformation Project at njscisupport@rutgers.edu.

Preview the Student NJ SCI Surveys: [Students Grades 3-5; Students Grades 6-12](#)

Guidelines for NJ SCI Survey Administration

Step 1

Communicate with school community members about the purpose of the NJ SCI Survey and importance of their participation. When school community members participate in data collection they can anonymously share their perceptions regarding the school environment. Think carefully about how to encourage survey participation. Let students, staff, and parents/caregivers know that their opinions matter and that the data collected will be used to inform strategic planning to address needs. Customizable pre-survey announcement letters to encourage survey participation of staff and parents/caregivers are available in the Data Collection and Reports workspace on the NJ SCI Platform, under the *Survey Deployment* tab. The “Download Sample Letters” button will appear once a survey deployment has been created, meaning survey dates for all groups are scheduled in the system, before users can access the letters. These letters inform school community members of upcoming survey administration and should be sent prior to sending sample letters with embedded survey links and passwords. **Embedded survey links and passwords in sample letters are unique to each school and should not be shared** with anyone other than the respondent groups taking the survey to ensure that respondents receive the correct survey link/password for their survey type and school. School and respondent group (e.g., Students Grades 3-5, Students Grades 6-12) appear at the top of each survey page to help further ensure respondents are using the correct link to complete the survey.

Sample language in the parent/caregiver letters provides information about the survey and links to preview student items in order to support the passive consent process. After communicating about the NJ SCI survey, the Data Coordinator and/or School Principal/Team Champion or Team Chair(s) should be available to answer any questions or concerns from school community members before, during, and after survey administration. If you are unsure of the answer to a question about the survey or the online platform, reach out to SCTP staff at njscisupport@rutgers.edu.

Step 2

Designate and prepare staff members who will help administer the NJ SCI Survey to students. When selecting staff members to support student administration, consider their schedules and availability, as well as their familiarity and comfort with using technology. Once designated, send staff the *Sample Letter for Staff Administering to Students* (via “Download Sample Letters” button once a survey has been deployed in “Survey Deployments” tab) which thanks them for their time and details important information for preparing for student administration.

These staff, along with the Data Coordinator and/or Team Champion or Team Chair(s), should carefully review the information in the [NJ SCI Survey Administration for Staff Administering to Students](#) handout, which includes procedures for administration, technical and timing issues, and ways to address student questions. If students have questions about the gender item in the survey, staff are advised to respond in a way that affirms that a student’s answer should reflect their own internal sense of gender, or who they feel they are on the inside. Staff are referred to the definition of gender identity in the [NJDOE Transgender Guidance for School Districts](#), to help explain different gender terms to students (see the handout referenced above for more information on addressing student questions). Providing accurate definitions in response to student questions (and otherwise) is reflective of a supportive and inclusive educational environment. If needed, refer students to a designated staff member(s) they can reach out to if they have additional questions about concepts related to gender identity.

The *NJ SCI Survey Administration for Staff Administering to Students* handout also includes sample scripts for introducing and explaining the purpose of the survey to students. The student sample scripts students contain

important information that should be read to students to ensure that they understand that completing the survey is voluntary and that their decision to participate in the survey or not participate, will not affect their grades. The script supports staff in reminding students that the survey is anonymous and questions about their background are asked only to describe how groups of students who complete the survey feel about their school. Additionally, it reminds students that they can skip any question they are not comfortable answering or do not want to answer. There are two versions of the student script as well as two student survey links for students in grades 3-5 and for students in grades 6-12. Although the *Sample Letter for Staff Administering to Students* noted above has auto-embedded survey links and passwords based on student grade levels at the school, data coordinators should confirm that all information and links are correct before sending to staff. As a reminder, survey links and passwords are unique to each school and should not be shared with anyone outside of the school community.

Notify staff of any students who have been opted out of survey administration by their parents/guardians, and/or students who may require special accommodations. Students that are opted out or would prefer not to participate should not be identified to classmates or singled out and should be given an alternate task to complete during the class period. Be available to provide additional support and assistance to staff prior to and during student survey administration, as needed. For instance, offer to meet with staff to address questions or concerns, ensure availability of technology and space for the day(s) of student administration, create and communicate a clear schedule for administering, and check in to ensure staff feel prepared. Staff are encouraged to report technical difficulties as well as any feedback on the items or content (e.g., if a student reported that the wording of an item was confusing) to the Data Coordinator. Data Coordinators should report this information back to SCTP staff by clicking on the “Share Feedback” button on the NJ SCI Platform. The information will be used to make improvements to the survey and platform.

Step 3

Plan for survey logistics to allow *all* school community members an opportunity to take the survey during a similar time period.

A. Create a schedule

- In a multi-school district, consult with district leaders first to find out whether the district will coordinate administration of the survey across all schools or allow individual schools to select their own timeframes. It is recommended that districts coordinate survey administration to allow for more meaningful data comparisons that are less impacted by timing-related factors or major events in the community. Aligning survey administration across schools in the same district also allows for more efficient communication with members of the school community and sends a unified message about the importance of the survey.
- In the “Data Collection and Reports” workspace on the NJ SCI Platform, under the “Survey Deployment” tab, click on the option to deploy the NJ SCI Survey and designate a “Start Date” and “End Date” for each respondent group (e.g., Students Grades 3-5; Students Grades 6-12) based on scheduling considerations below. You may assign different start and end dates for different groups. Links for all relevant groups are created within a single survey deployment. **DO NOT CREATE A SEPARATE/NEW DEPLOYMENT FOR EACH RESPONDENT GROUP.** Keeping groups within the same deployment will ensure that survey results can be easily compared as part of the same data report. Once a deployment is created, you will be able to revise survey start and end dates as needed.

- If feasible, staff should take the survey within 7-10 days of release of the survey link. Consider giving staff time to take the survey during a faculty meeting or as part of an extended or additional preparation or professional development period. As a reminder, participation in the survey is voluntary. No respondent should feel pressured to participate if they do not want to.
- Survey parents/caregivers within 14 days of release of the survey link. Additional time can be given to promote participation, as needed. Consider providing opportunities for parents/caregivers to take the survey when they are in the building for other purposes.
- Plan to administer surveys to all students within 5 school days, if feasible. If your school has students in grades 3-5 as well as grades 6-12, schedule administration of both versions of the survey to students within the same time frame. Student surveys are only accessible on weekdays between the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.; anyone trying to access the surveys outside of those hours will be redirected to a page stating that they should return to the survey during typical school hours. The student surveys will time out after 24 hours of being open for security purposes.
- Set aside at least a full class period for students to take the survey in order to ensure that staff have enough time to introduce the survey, give instructions on how to access the survey link, and answer any questions, as indicated in *NJ SCI Survey Administration for Staff Administering to Students* handout.
- Avoid surveying too early in the school year or immediately following long breaks to allow routines to solidify; avoid time around holidays, standardized testing periods, or periods immediately following significant events.
- Survey links will close at 11:59 pm on specified “End Dates.” The platform will send an automated reminder email to the Data Coordinator(s), School Principal/Team Champion, and Team Chair(s) a few days prior to the closing of a survey link with a prompt to revise “End Dates” if additional time is needed.

B. Coordinate space and technology

- **Students should complete the survey while in the school building under the supervision of staff** who are prepared to administer the survey and respond to questions.
- Identify survey locations (i.e., computer lab, classrooms) and times to ensure minimal distractions. Determine which devices students will use to take the survey while in the building.
- The NJ SCI Survey can be completed on computers/laptops, tablets, and mobile devices. Test Wi-Fi bandwidth to accommodate the number of students taking the survey. Surveys should only be completed electronically.

C. Plan for additional accommodations for students, as necessary

- **Consider special accommodations for students as needed**, such as make-up days, quiet spaces/rooms, and extra time to complete the survey. While planning for accommodations and extended time, please keep in mind that after 24 hours of being open, the student survey link will time out for security purposes. Any accommodations provided should be paired with efforts to protect the confidentiality of students’ responses.
- **Examples of potential accommodations** and modifications for students with disabilities may include:
 - Reading the survey aloud

- Allowing for frequent breaks (the survey link will not time out within 24 hours of being open if it is left open on the webpage and the device being used is not shut down)
- Providing extra time to participate in the survey process (but no more than 24 hours beyond when the survey is first opened)
- Providing alternative settings for survey administration
- Assisting in actual survey participation/keyboard use
- Consulting with special services staff for assistance, if needed
- Considering other differentiation supports for students. (e.g., Text-To-Speech Reader)

Step 4

Distribute survey links to school community members using customizable sample letters and scripts. Designated staff who will help administer the student survey should download [NJ SCI Survey Administration for Staff Administering to Students](#) and use the sample scripts in the document to provide an introduction and instructions to students before they begin the survey. After reading the instructions and answering any potential questions, staff may share the link and password to the survey. The link and password may be posted on a collaborative drive like Google or learning management systems, like Canvas or Blackboard, and then removed to prevent student re-entry. Staff may also set up computers in advance with the survey link bookmarked but should not share the password with students until instructions are read and questions are answered.

Sample letters are available with embedded survey links and passwords for staff and parents/caregivers in the *Data Collection & Reports* workspace on the NJ SCI Platform, under the “Survey Deployment” tab (see “Download Sample Letters” button). Ensure that staff and parents/caregivers are sent the correct sample letter with the corresponding survey link and password for their respective respondent group (i.e., Students Grades 3-5; Students Grades 6-12; Staff; Parents/Caregivers). In their sample letter, parents/caregivers are informed that they may submit a separate survey response per child in the school building if they feel their children’s experiences vary. Please note that “they/them” pronouns are used in the Parents/Caregivers Survey when referring to individual students in order to be inclusive of different ways students may identify.

Additionally, please note that a pre-selected password is assigned for each respondent group to help ensure that respondents are given access to the appropriate link for their respondent type. Passwords may be changed to help enhance security or to prevent student re-entry (i.e., if student administration is finished but some students will participate in a make-up session, the password can be changed to ensure that only these students can access the link). Avoid long or highly complex passwords as respondents will have to manually type in the password to initiate the survey. Corresponding links and passwords (whether pre-selected or customized) are automatically embedded into the downloadable sample letters and scripts for all corresponding respondent groups. Sample letters can be further customized once downloaded and should be emailed directly to adults taking the staff and parent/caregiver surveys or posted to the school’s password-protected website or portal. As a reminder, passwords and survey links should not be accessible to students whose parents/caregivers have indicated they do not give permission for their child to take the survey.

Current response rates for respective surveys can be found in the *Data Collection & Reports* workspace, under the Survey Deployments tab (this summary is also available in the “Dashboard”). Use this information to inform and track progress on survey administration and to determine when to close survey links.

After the Survey

Once administration to all respondent groups is complete, click the “Generate Reports” button in the *Data Collection and Reports* workspace to officially close survey links and begin generating data results. Schools may modify survey “End Dates” for all respondent groups if more time is needed. NJ SCI Survey links **CANNOT** be re-opened after school reports are generated. In order to access the school’s data reports and begin exploring strengths and emergent needs, the Data Coordinator(s), Team Champion, and/or Team Chair(s) **must** click the “Generate Reports” button. School teams should plan for follow-up communications with students, staff, and parents/caregivers thanking them for their participation and summarizing the results once data are discussed as a team. Resources and guidance on next steps, including how to prioritize needs based on the data, are available on the NJ SCI Platform.