



# NJ SCI Survey Administration Guidelines

## *For Staff Helping to Administer to Students*

The New Jersey School Climate Improvement (NJ SCI) Survey is a comprehensive assessment designed to help districts and schools 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/caregivers (with a child/children in any grade level(s) in the building). Topics covered on the survey include relationships, safety, sense of connectedness, teaching and learning, and features of an equitable and supportive learning environment, including supports for social and emotional learning.

**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. Sample communications are included in this document to encourage participation from students.

Staff who will help administer the survey to students should carefully review the guidelines below in preparation and preview the student surveys: [Students Grades 3-5](#); [Students Grades 6-12](#). Student surveys are also available in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Brazilian Portuguese, and Arabic. The NJ SCI Survey is administered electronically via the NJ SCI Platform. If you have additional questions or concerns, reach out to your designated Data Coordinator, Team Chair, or Principal.

### Procedures

Staff administering the survey to students should be aware of any students whose parents/caregivers have opted them out of the survey. Ensure these students do not follow the instructions to begin the survey and that the password is not accessible to them. Students that are opted out or would prefer not to participate should not be identified to classmates or singled out and should have another task to work on during the period. The Data Coordinator and/or school administrators will reach out with names of students who have been opted out and regarding any special accommodations needed for students during survey administration (i.e., small breaks or additional time to take the survey as needed). Students that need additional time to survey can leave the

survey open for up to 24 hours (if left open on the same webpage/device) before the survey times out for security purposes. Responses received prior to this 24-hour timeout are recorded.

Below are sample scripts that staff should read to introduce students to the survey. 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. Staff should confirm that they have received the appropriate survey link(s) and password(s) for the school in which they work as well as the student grade level(s) they are helping to proctor prior to student survey administration date(s). Students in grades Pre-K-2 should **not** take the NJ SCI Survey. Staff should reach out to the Data Coordinator(s) and/or Team Chair or Principal if there are concerns or questions about the survey link and password. On the day of student survey administration, staff should introduce the survey to students and deliver all instructions using the sample scripts before sharing the link and password. Avoid providing the link and password to students until all instructions have been explained and any initial questions have been answered. Remind students that they can take the survey in any language from the options provided and that they can switch languages if needed.

Staff administering the survey to students should keep the following in mind:

- ▶ Ensure only the students who are permitted to take the survey are given instructions, along with the survey link and password.
- ▶ Ensure students receive the correct survey link and password based on school name and grade level.
- ▶ Configure seating to ensure privacy.
- ▶ Remind students that the survey is anonymous and voluntary as emphasized in the student sample scripts below. Students can skip any question(s) they prefer not to answer or stop at any time.
- ▶ Answer any questions prior to the start of the survey.

**Avoid using incentives to encourage respondent participation.** Offering rewards for participation might encourage false or duplicate entries by students. Instead, remind students that their voice and feedback are important and will be used to guide school improvements. Consider ways to engage and motivate students to take the survey by using creative communications methods (e.g., social media posts, public service and morning announcements, etc.). The survey should **never be given as a graded assignment** as this might coerce students into responding.

### Technical and Timing Issues

Set aside an entire class period in order to introduce the survey, provide instructions for accessing the link, and answer questions students may have before they begin the survey. Staff may need to address technical and timing issues and additional questions during the administration process. Below are recommendations for addressing issues that may arise:

- ▶ If a computer or webpage error occurs, try selecting “refresh” or “reload.”
- ▶ If a student has an issue with the survey link, webpage, or a computer malfunction early in the survey, they may start the survey over again.
- ▶ If a student completes most of the survey and experiences a technical error, they should *not* retake the survey. Staff should assure students that the responses they have submitted will be received and thank them for taking the survey.
- ▶ Give students a warning when there are ten minutes remaining and allow extended time as needed, if possible.

- ▶ If students complete the survey before time is up, provide guidance on other quiet activities (e.g., work on other schoolwork, start another class assignment, etc.).

Document any technical issues with as much detail as possible and share them with your Principal and/or Data Coordinator(s).

### **Addressing Student Questions**

Staff should take steps to make students feel as comfortable as possible while taking the survey. If students have any questions during the survey:

- ▶ Remind students to remain seated and raise their hand and you will go to them to assist.
- ▶ Approach students from the front of their computer screen and let them know you will only look at the screen and their answers if they want you to do so.
- ▶ Provide general answers to students' questions to avoid influencing their responses. Often the best response to a student question is to remind them that there are no right or wrong answers, and to answer to the best of their ability.
- ▶ If students are having difficulty reading a word(s), or are unclear of what a word means, you may read the word(s) and/or provide a definition without influencing their response.
- ▶ If students ask for clarification on the item on gender, respond in a way that affirms that a student's answer should reflect their own internal sense of gender, or for younger students, who they feel they are on the inside.
  - ▶ For grades 3-5, students may ask what it means to "use a different word" other than "boy/male" or "girl/female" to describe their gender. As per the definition of gender identity in the [NJDOE Transgender Guidance for School Districts](#), you can explain that a person's gender may be different than what they were called when they were born, and that there are other words some people use to describe their gender aside from boy or girl.
  - ▶ For grades 6-12, students may ask for clarification about the terms "Transgender" and "Non-binary" which are presented as response options. According to the guidance above, "Transgender" describes a person whose gender identity or expression is different from those typically associated with the sex they were called when they were born. "Non-binary" describes people who do not identify as a boy/male or a girl/female. Providing these accurate definitions in response to student questions (and otherwise) is reflective of a supportive and inclusive educational environment. Students can select more than one response option for this item.
  - ▶ If needed, refer students to a designated staff member(s) if they have additional questions about concepts related to gender identity. It is helpful to have a safe space within the school that is designated for students to discuss issues related to gender and sexuality.
- ▶ Students, especially those in grades 3-5, may need support in using the 4-point Likert scales, which for most items measure whether they "Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree" with items. Some items ask students if they perceive behaviors to be "Not at all a Problem, A Small Problem, A Medium Problem, or A Big Problem." Other items ask what proportion of other students or teachers do something ("None, Some, Most, All"). If needed, clarify the scale to the student without influencing their responses. If students say they feel differently at different points in the day or throughout the year, advise them to select the option that represents how they feel most of the time.

*Instructions: The scripts below should be read to students right before they are given instructions for taking the survey, survey links, and the password. You may revise language in the scripts, as needed.*

### **Sample Script for Students Grades 3-5 Survey**

A survey is when a lot of people are asked questions to gather information about something. Today you are being asked to take a survey called the New Jersey School Climate Improvement (NJ SCI) Survey, pronounced like “sky.” Sometimes people talk about “climate” when they describe the weather and how it feels to be outside. For this survey, we are trying to learn more about “school climate” or how it feels to be a student in this school. Since you go to school here and know how it feels to be a student, you are an expert in school climate. We appreciate your help today in telling us how you feel about this school on the survey. Your answers will help us to know more about what it is like to be a student in this school. We will use what students tell us on the survey to help make our school a better place.

This survey is voluntary. This means if you do not want to take the survey, you do not have to. This is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. This survey will not affect your grades in school. It is okay if you skip any questions. You can stop the survey at any time. Your answers are private. No one will know how you answered. There are questions about how you describe yourself. They are only used to understand how groups of students feel about their school.

Before beginning the survey, pick the language you want to take the survey in. You can switch languages throughout the survey if you want to. You should read the instructions on each page. For most items, or statements on this survey, you will be asked how much you agree or disagree with them. You can select strongly disagree, which means you disagree a lot or strongly agree if you agree a lot. You can also select “Agree” or “Disagree” options if you agree or disagree a little bit.

While you are taking the survey, please work quietly and keep your eyes on your own screen. If you need help or have any questions, please raise your hand and I will come over to help you. I will not look at the answers on your screen. If you finish the survey early, please work quietly at your seat so that others can focus. In a moment, I will give you the survey link and the password. Does anyone have any questions? Thank you again for helping us learn more about our school.

## Sample Script for Students Grades 6-12 Survey

Today you are being asked to take a survey called the New Jersey School Climate Improvement (NJ SCI) Survey, pronounced like “sky.” Sometimes people talk about “climate” when they describe the weather and how it feels to be outside. For this survey, we are trying to learn more about “school climate” or how it feels to be a student in this school. We want to hear your opinions, and appreciate your help in telling us about your experiences in school. Your answers will help us to see what it is like to be a student here. We will use the information students tell us on the survey to consider ways to improve our school. We know that during the school day, you have many different experiences in different classes. When answering a question, try to think about how you feel most of the time.

This survey is voluntary. This means if you do not want to take the survey, you do not have to. This is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. This survey will not affect your grades in school. It is okay if you skip any questions. You can stop the survey at any time. Your answers are private. No one will know how you answered. There are questions about how you describe yourself. They are only used to understand how groups of students feel about their school.

Before beginning the survey, pick the language you want to take the survey in. You can switch languages throughout the survey if you want to. You should read the instructions on each page. For most items, or statements on this survey, you will be asked how much you agree or disagree with them. You can select strongly disagree, which means you disagree a lot or strongly agree if you agree a lot. You can also select “Agree” or “Disagree” options if you agree or disagree a little bit.

While you are taking the survey, please work quietly and keep your eyes on your own screen. If you need help or have any questions, please raise your hand and I will come over to help you. I will not look at the answers on your screen. If you finish the survey early, please work quietly at your seat so that others can focus. In a moment, I will give you the survey link and the password. Does anyone have any questions? Thank you again for helping us learn more about our school.