



Compendium of Frequently Asked Questions

This resource will be continuously updated in response to new questions and as new features become available on the NJ SCI Platform.

Topic	Questions
<p>I. <u>NJ SCI Platform and General Programmatic Questions</u></p>	<p><u>What is the School Climate Change Process (SCCP)?</u></p> <p><u>What is the NJ SCI Platform?</u></p> <p><u>What is the NJ SCI Survey?</u></p> <p><u>What topics are covered on the NJ SCI Survey?</u> <u>How can my district/school get started in using the NJ SCI Platform?</u></p> <p><u>Can someone other than Superintendent sign the Terms of Use for the NJ SCI Platform to authorize district use?</u></p> <p><u>Which school districts are eligible to use the NJ SCI Platform?</u></p> <p><u>If a district authorizes use of the NJ SCI Platform, does every school in the district have to participate?</u></p> <p><u>How many districts in New Jersey are using the NJ SCI Platform?</u></p> <p><u>What should a district do first after their Superintendent has signed the Terms of Use for the NJ SCI Platform?</u></p> <p><u>What can I expect as a user while the NJ SCI Platform continues to be developed and enhanced over time?</u></p>
<p>II. <u>Access, Onboarding, and Team Development</u></p>	<p><u>Who can be granted access to the NJ SCI Platform, and how do they get access?</u></p> <p><u>Why should we form a representative School Climate Leadership Team (SCLT) on our platform workspace?</u></p> <p><u>What are Team Roles on the SCLT and can they be changed once they are designated?</u></p> <p><u>What is the District Climate Leadership Team (DCLT) in the NJ SCI Platform?</u></p>

	<p>Are the NJ SCI Survey and Platform designed with accessibility in mind?</p> <p>Can parents/caregivers who are involved in board of education and/or school initiatives be provided access to the NJ SCI Platform/data reports?</p> <p>Can students be provided access to the NJ SCI Platform/data reports?</p>
<p>III. NJ SCI Survey (Instruments)</p>	<p>Who can take the NJ SCI Survey?</p> <p>When should the NJ SCI Survey be administered?</p> <p>How often should the NJ SCI Survey be administered during a single school year?</p> <p>Can we decide which parts of the survey, or specific domains, to administer to select respondent groups?</p> <p>How long does it take to complete the NJ SCI Survey?</p> <p>Will the survey and related communications be available in languages other than English?</p> <p>Can we share copies of the survey with parents/caregivers prior to the administration period?</p> <p>Why is there no “Neutral” response option for students, staff, and parents/caregivers on the survey?</p> <p>Are there items on diversity, equity, and inclusion on the survey?</p> <p>Why are students asked about their gender on the NJ SCI Survey and what are their response options?</p> <p>What is the “Supports for Social and Emotional Learning” domain on the NJ SCI Survey actually measuring?</p> <p>Can anyone identify respondents on the surveys?</p> <p>Are there open-ended questions on the NJ SCI Survey?</p> <p>How will the data from the NJ SCI Survey be used by Rutgers University? Will district data be shared?</p> <p>Are benchmarking data available to compare how our school/district are doing with others?</p>

<p>IV. <u>Survey Administration and Reporting (Logistics)</u></p>	<p><u>Who can deploy the NJ SCI Survey in our school community?</u></p> <p><u>How do participants access the survey?</u></p> <p><u>Can participants take the survey more than once?</u></p> <p><u>Should students who miss the survey be permitted to make it up?</u></p> <p><u>When and how will our district/schools receive our data reports for the NJ SCI Survey?</u></p> <p><u>Can the data be compared in the system across schools in the same district?</u></p> <p><u>Do parents and caregivers need to provide consent for their child(ren) to take the NJ SCI Survey?</u></p> <p><u>Why is it recommended that parents and caregivers be notified about student surveys at least two weeks prior to their start date?</u></p> <p><u>How can we share the data from the NJ SCI Platform with the broader community?</u></p>
<p>V. <u>Pilot and Validation</u></p>	<p><u>How did the survey perform in the pilot study, and when will it be finalized?</u></p>
<p>VI. <u>Data Ownership and Security</u></p>	<p><u>Where and how are the data collected through the NJ SCI Platform stored?</u></p> <p><u>How can data be removed or deleted from the system?</u></p>

I. NJ SCI Platform and General Programmatic Questions

What is the School Climate Change Process (SCCP)?

The School Climate Change Process (SCCP) is a data driven process designed to promote changes in systems and behaviors through the development and implementation of a comprehensive school climate improvement plan for which progress is monitored over time.

Schools begin the SCCP by forming a high-functioning School Climate Leadership Team (SCLT), comprised of diverse school community members, that drives and monitors improvement efforts. Teams collaborate to collect and analyze school climate survey data from students, staff, and parents/caregivers, and use these and other data to drive the development of goals and a comprehensive and coordinated strategic plan. Development of this comprehensive strategic plan requires ongoing communication and collaboration with school community members. This helps ensure equitable access to data and feedback throughout the change process and is essential for achieving goals. Once schools begin to implement their plans, they evaluate progress and make necessary modifications based on new data and information collected. Schools continuously cycle through this process of collecting data and evaluating progress over the course of several years. Research suggests systemic, positive changes related to school climate improvement typically take three to five years (Cawelti, 1999; Protheroe, 2011).

Leadership support and coordination at the district level is vital to starting and sustaining the SCCP. District leaders champion the importance of this work in the community and enact leadership skills and competencies to drive the SCCP, including aligning a district's vision and values to school climate goals and priorities, engaging various groups in the community, and providing structures and supports to enable individuals and teams to effectively and efficiently facilitate school climate improvement activities. Equity, particularly as it relates to communicating and engaging with school community members, is prioritized throughout each element of the SCCP and is attended to by both district- and school-level leaders. For more information, [click here](#) to view a brief learning module.

What is the NJ SCI Platform?

The NJ SCI Platform (pronounced NJ "sky") is a free, web-based application designed to support district- and school-level school climate improvement efforts. The application provides district- and school-level workspaces for members of the District School Climate Leadership Team (DCLT) and School Climate Leadership Teams (SCLT) with access to team development resources, data collection tools, automated reporting features, guided data analysis and prioritization support, goal-setting resources, evidence-based strategy and intervention resources, and tools for monitoring progress towards goals and implementation quality. The NJ SCI Survey is the main source of data for driving school climate improvement efforts. The NJ SCI Survey and Platform enable districts and schools to take a "blue sky" approach to imagining the possibilities for improving their cultures and climates for all members of the school community.

What is the NJ SCI Survey?

The New Jersey School Climate Improvement (NJ SCI) Survey was developed by the School Climate Transformation Project (SCTP) at Rutgers University in collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). The NJ SCI Survey is designed to help schools identify school climate strengths and needs and use these data to create strategic plans to improve conditions for teaching and learning. [Click here](#) to view domains, or major topic areas, of school climate covered on the NJ SCI Survey for all respondent groups (i.e., students, staff, and parents/caregivers). The NJ SCI Survey is administered through the NJ SCI Platform. The survey and associated communication tools are available in multiple languages for students and parents and caregivers.

The NJ SCI Survey will replace the New Jersey School Climate Survey (NJSCS) in 2023, following a pilot (Spring 2022) and validation (Fall 2022) study with selected districts to support schools in implementing the School Climate Change Process (SCCP). Revisions to this instrument have been guided by a rigorous review of current research literature and analyses of previously collected NJSCS data from schools across New Jersey. The NJ SCI Survey development process included an expansive input process, involving representatives from educational organizations that support schools and districts, to ensure the survey meets the current and emerging needs of K-12 schools in the state of New Jersey.

What topics are covered on the NJ SCI Survey?

[Click here](#) to view domains covered on the NJ SCI Survey for all respondent groups. The domains, or major topic areas, on the NJ SCI Survey were developed after a comprehensive review of the research literature and best practices for measuring school climate. In addition, the developers engaged diverse school community members from across the state of New Jersey, representing various organizations and roles, to ensure the constructs covered best represent the needs and priorities in the state.

How can my district/school get started using the NJ SCI Platform?

The Superintendent, Charter School Lead, Chief School Administrator (CSA), or an individual authorized by law to sign agreements on behalf of the entity, must sign the Terms of Use on behalf of their district or school to authorize access for staff to the NJ SCI Platform. If you want to bring this opportunity to your district, fill out the contact form at the bottom of [NJ SCI Platform homepage](#) and a member of our staff will reach out to your Superintendent, Charter School Lead, or Chief School Administrator (CSA) with more information on how to sign up.

Can someone other than Superintendent sign the Terms of Use for the NJ SCI Platform to authorize district use?

Our system requires that the individual who completes the NJ SCI Platform Terms of Use on behalf of the district holds one of the following roles: Superintendent, Acting Superintendent, Chief School Administrator, or Charter School Lead, or is an individual authorized by law to sign agreements on behalf of the entity. Other district personnel may review the Terms of Use prior to having the Superintendent sign and accept on behalf of the district or entity. The individual who signs the Terms of Use also receives the Superintendent log-in credentials and most expansive permissions, which allows them to onboard additional authorized users in the district. Charters or other non-traditional organizations with unique leadership structures may reach out to njscisupport@rutgers.edu for support in considering who is authorized to sign the Terms of Use and occupy specific roles within the NJ SCI Platform.

Which school districts are eligible to use the NJ SCI Platform?

All New Jersey public school districts and charter schools, including approved private schools for students with disabilities (APPSDs), are eligible to use the NJ SCI Platform.

If a district authorizes use of the NJ SCI Platform, does every school in the district have to participate?

All schools in the district are eligible, but are not required, to use the NJ SCI Survey and Platform if the Terms of Use for the NJ SCI Platform are signed. The Superintendent and/or District Climate Coordinator (DCC) should communicate with all school principals to assess interest and decide which schools will participate. Completing the NJ SCI Platform Terms of Use is *not* an obligation to use the survey, but it will allow any school climate team in the district to use the NJ SCI Platform for team development, survey administration, and additional features as they are made available.

How many districts in New Jersey are using the NJ SCI Platform?

Over 60 districts from all over the state began using the platform during the pilot phase. Any district can join the NJ SCI Platform during the 2022-2023 school year.

What should a district do first after their Superintendent has signed the Terms of Use for the NJ SCI Platform?

Districts should appoint a district-level staff member(s) to serve as District Climate Coordinator (DCC). A step in the Superintendent’s platform onboarding process will ask the Superintendent to invite the DCC (if selecting a staff member other than themselves to serve in the role). The Superintendent may serve in this role in smaller districts or in the early stages of adoption. The District Climate Coordinator(s) provides support to school leaders and their teams in the School Climate Change Process and helps coordinate district-wide school climate efforts. This involves using NJ SCI Survey data to identify needs and track progress over time and aligning strategic plans across schools to district-level goals and values. District-level staff focused on data, diversity equity and inclusion, school culture and climate, or social and emotional learning may be well-positioned for the role. School Principals and other school-based staff cannot be designated as DCCs given their primary roles as leaders of school-level efforts. Large districts may appoint multiple District Climate Coordinators, as needed, based on capacity and other considerations at the district level. For support in selecting a DCC in your district, [click here](#).

What can I expect as a user while the NJ SCI Platform continues to be developed and enhanced over time?

New workspaces may be opened and/or enhanced with additional features over time to support the ongoing implementation of the School Climate Change Process (SCCP). The SCLP will continue to improve upon existing workspaces and design new features and resources based on platform user feedback as well as alignment with best practices associated with the steps in the SCCP. Please help inform this improvement process by using the “Share Feedback” button on the NJ SCI Platform or by reaching out to us at njscisupport@rutgers.edu to share feedback or comments about your experience as a user on the platform.

[Return to Table](#)

II. **Access, Onboarding, and Team Development**

Who can be granted access to the NJ SCI Platform, and how do they get access?

District and/or school leaders can decide which individuals with district-issued email accounts are granted access to the NJ SCI Platform and what level of authorization they receive related to data collection, analysis, and planning based on Team Roles designated in the NJ SCI Platform. When a user is added, an invitation will be sent to the user directly from noreply@njschoolclimate.org. We recommend safe-listing this email address and checking spam filters and other mechanisms if the invitation is not received within a few minutes of sending.

All users aside from the Chief School Administrator (CSA)/Superintendent/Charter School Lead, who signs the Terms of Use on behalf of the district, will acknowledge individual “Terms and Conditions” of platform use. The CSA/ Superintendent/Charter School Lead and District Climate Coordinator(s) (DCC) will have permissions to create school sites, invite School Principals (Team Champions), and view school-level data and strategic plans across buildings.

School Principals and designated Team Chairs on the School Climate Leadership Team (SCLT) will have permissions to add SCLT members and launch the NJ SCI Survey. School-level Data Coordinators will have permissions to launch and manage the NJ SCI Survey administration along with the School Principal and designated Team Chair(s). All other school team members will have the ability to view their school-level data and develop/edit strategic plans through the system. School team members only have access to their school site, unless invited directly to another school team or the district team. All district staff added to the system (individuals that do not work alongside Principals in a specific building but have district-wide responsibilities), aside from the Superintendent and DCC, have access to all school sites and the district site. All users added to the NJ SCI Platform **must use a district-issued email account**, including any external consultants.

Why should we form a representative School Climate Leadership Team (SCLT) on our platform workspace?

The NJ SCI Platform supports the formation and ongoing development of a School Climate Leadership Team (SCLT) in each participating school in the district to lead the School Climate Change Process. Developing or forming a SCLT from either an existing School Safety/School Climate Team or another related team in your building is essential to effectively implementing steps in the School Climate Change Process. Teams collaborate to collect and analyze school climate data and use these and other data to drive decisions related to a comprehensive and coordinated strategic plan.

What are the Team Roles on the SCLT and can they be changed once they are designated?

We recommend that a diverse and representative team be formed for effectively enacting all steps in the School Climate Change Process (SCCP). All team members in the system have a wide range of permissions that allow them to help design and edit strategic plans, as well as take and save team notes in the system. In addition to “Team Members,” who have the ability to view school-level data and develop/edit strategic plans through the system, there are three other roles on the team that have elevated permissions in the system. They are “Team Champion”, who is always the School Principal, “Team Chair”, and “Data Coordinator”. Once the team is formed, they can engage in a fun and practical activity in the platform to support the designation of these team roles. Designating team roles is an effective way of distributing responsibilities for tasks and ensuring that the work of the SCCP does not fall on the shoulders of one person. Individuals designated as Team Chairs have elevated permissions in the school site similar to School Principals (i.e., they can invite new team members to the school team, change their own and others’ roles, and deploy surveys) while individuals designated as Data Coordinators have permission in the system to deploy a survey. Only School Principals/Team Champions have permission to delete a deployment. The activity can be repeated as team composition changes or new members are added. Principals/Team Champions and Team Chairs can change designated Team Roles in the system for team members at any time using the drop-down menus in the Team Home tab in the School Climate Leadership Team workspace. If changes are made to a team member’s role, notify the team member to ensure they are aware of recent changes to their role and associated permissions.

What is the District Climate Leadership Team (DCLT) in the NJ SCI Platform?

Each school district will have an associated NJ SCI Platform district site, and the platform provides resources to support district-level staff in the data analysis and planning process. The more leadership support and coaching capacity your district can offer to schools as they navigate this multi-year process, the better. Developing a team of leaders at the district-level, which includes Principals from participating schools, ensures sustainability of efforts to improve school climate and provides the opportunity for district administrators to collaborate and support the varied needs of individual School Climate Leadership Teams. The District Climate Leadership Team (DCLT) on the NJ SCI Platform consists initially of the Superintendent, District Climate Coordinator (who is a district-level Supervisor, Director, or Assistant Superintendent designated to assist the Superintendent in this work), and all School Principals whose schools were added to the system. These individuals are automatically added to the district team workspace and given access to the district site in order to promote collaboration and coordination across buildings in the district. Additional district-level staff may be added to the DCLT in addition to these core team members.

Are the NJ SCI Survey and Platform designed with accessibility in mind?

The NJ SCI Platform is designed in accordance with standards and best practices for accessibility as it relates to online or web-based applications. The NJ SCI Platform and Survey are compatible with Text-to-Speech readers. School staff administering the survey to students are encouraged to provide appropriate accommodations to ensure all students can participate in taking the survey while still taking steps to preserve anonymity. The NJ SCI Survey Reporting features have been checked for contrast and to be colorblind-safe using Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA. Additional improvements will be made based on user feedback on overall look and feel as well as accessibility.

Can parents/caregivers who are involved in board of education and/or school initiatives be provided access to the NJ SCI Platform/data reports?

District and/or school leaders can decide which individuals with district-issued email accounts are granted access to the NJ SCI Platform and what level of authorization they receive related to data collection, analysis, and planning. Parents, caregivers, and community members should only be granted access to the NJ SCI Platform using **district-issued email addresses**, which can be deactivated when their official involvement or role with the district/school comes to an end. These users will have to acknowledge the same Terms and Conditions as staff with respect to appropriate uses of data.

Can students be provided access to the NJ SCI Platform/data reports?

Promoting student involvement and leadership in the process of improving school climate is an excellent practice which should be done with care. Students should *never* be given direct log-in access to the NJ SCI Platform as team members, as this will grant them access to potentially sensitive data, notes, and other information archived on the platform. As with other sensitive matters the school climate team may discuss, such as HIB, you will need to use discretion regarding access to data reports and other materials and discussions for the students. However, many of the data displays and metrics in the reports are excellent teaching tools for promoting data literacy and an understanding of data visualization principles, and can be used by SCLT members to support student involvement in discussions of strengths and needs, as well as root causes and potential interventions. For instance, SCLT members may choose to project or share screens that display the interactive reporting features/data visuals or strategic planning resources during a meeting with students in order to gather input and generate discussions. At the discretion of the SCLT, they may also choose to download and share static PDF reports, featuring overall means for domains and items.

[Return to Table](#)

III. NJ SCI Survey (Instruments)

Who can take the NJ SCI Survey?

The NJ SCI Survey is designed for students in grades 3-12, school staff, and parents and caregivers. Students in Pre-K to second grade should *not* take the NJ SCI Survey, but staff and parents/caregivers in a school serving those grades can take the survey. In the future, the platform will offer resources for assessing perceptions of school climate among younger students. The survey and platform are designed to meet accessibility requirements, and school staff should provide necessary supports and accommodations to students with disabilities so that all students have an opportunity to participate in the survey.

The Staff Survey is designed to be used with all staff members in the building. Roles are listed out and are categorized as Certified and Non-Certified for disaggregation purposes. The Parent and Caregiver survey can be used by one or more adult caretakers with a child in the school. Adults who are both staff and parents/caregivers in the district may take the survey for both groups. Parents and caregivers with more than one child in a school are able to (but not required to) complete the survey for each child if they feel their children have varying experiences within the school.

When should the NJ SCI Survey be administered?

The NJ SCI Survey is designed to be reliable and flexible to the time of year. It is recommended that schools avoid surveying in the first few weeks of a new school year, when new routines are typically being established and new students are acclimating to the building. Schools should avoid scheduling on days where student impressions of the school environment may be highly affected (e.g., Halloween, day of a big game, standardized testing when stress may be higher, etc.). Periods immediately following major crises should also be avoided, when possible. Schools may decide to

wait a few weeks after a major policy change or scheduling shift to allow routines to reform. Staff and Parent/Caregiver Surveys can be taken any day of the week during the survey administration time period created on the NJ SCI Platform. Student surveys are only accessible on weekdays between the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.

How often should the NJ SCI Survey be administered during a single school year?

While there is no restriction on the number of times a school can deploy the NJ SCI Survey, one well-executed survey administration per school year 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.

Can we decide which parts of the survey, or specific domains, to administer to select respondent groups?

See our [informational flier](#) overviewing the domains, or major topic areas, featured on the NJ SCI Survey. The surveys are meant to be taken in one sitting and include all the domains listed, which together reflect the overall quality of school climate. The NJ SCI Survey *cannot* be edited or changed in the NJ SCI Platform (no items may be removed), and you may not use or change the materials outside of the platform and attribute those revised materials to the SCTP. Respondents have the option to opt out of the survey and skip any items while taking the survey. “Not Applicable” responses are offered for specific items on the staff survey.

Districts and/or schools may decide not to survey a specific respondent group during a survey deployment, although doing so will limit the team’s ability to use the full set of comparison tools via the NJ SCI Platform to support data analysis and comparisons across groups and schools in the district. Different survey administration dates can be set for different respondent groups as part of the same deployment.

How long does it take to complete the NJ SCI Survey?

The NJ SCI Survey is new and has not yet been widely tested with a diverse group of respondents. The approximate average completion times for respondent groups on the pilot version of the survey (which included more items than will be included in the final survey) are as follows: 15 minutes for Students Grades 3-5; 10 minutes for Students Grades 6-12; 12 minutes for Staff; and 7 minutes for Parents/Caregivers. Updated estimates of average response time will be provided for the final surveys once the data are available.

Generally, we recommend setting aside a single-block class period (about 40-45 minutes) for completing set up and administration of the NJ SCI Survey. Set-up includes arranging technology, delivering instructions, answering questions, and providing the password to students taking the survey. Students requiring extended time should be provided with it (up to 24 hours, after which student survey links will close for security purposes). We suggest administering the survey to students within 5 consecutive school days (i.e. one full school week), if possible.

For staff, we recommend providing time during the scheduled workday, such as during a Faculty Meeting or PLC. The Staff Survey has additional domains focused on perceptions of professional support and the work environment. We recommend allowing staff to survey within 7-10 consecutive days.

Parents and caregivers should be given the longest window of possible dates to participate to allow flexibility in starting and completing the survey. We recommend surveying parents and caregivers within 14 consecutive days, but additional time can be given, if needed. Staff and parents/caregivers may start the survey and return later to their survey in progress if the survey is kept open in a browser. See the [NJ SCI Survey Administration Guidelines for Data Coordinators](#) for more information for more timing guidelines for all respondent groups.

Will the survey and related communications be available in languages other than English?

The NJ SCI Survey and corresponding materials (including student survey PDFs and downloadable sample letters) for students and parents/caregivers are currently available in English, Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, Haitian Creole and Arabic. The survey will be translated into additional languages based on need.

Can we share copies of the surveys with parents/caregivers prior to the administration period?

Schools can easily share links to PDF preview copies of the Student Surveys (Grades 3-5, 6-12) with the community using links provided in downloadable sample letters document (available in the Survey Deployments tab on the NJ SCI Platform) once a survey deployment is created. PDF copies of the Student Surveys are also available in the Resources tab.

By request, districts and schools can receive PDF preview copies of the surveys for all respondent groups but discretion should be used to limit access to the questions on an as-needed basis, as individuals reviewing the surveys may also be asked to participate. Reviewing all the items beforehand, rather than reacting to them in the moment while taking the survey, could influence respondents' answers and have a priming effect.

You are welcome to share survey items with the school board, and the public, with the considerations described above in mind. If you receive any feedback or hear any concerns, please feel free to pass the information on to us, and feel free to refer individuals with questions about the instrument to njscisupport@rutgers.edu.

Why is there no "Neutral" response option for students, staff, and parents/caregivers on the survey?

All response sets on the NJ SCI Survey are on a four-point Likert scale, most of which capture perceptions ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The developers of the survey did not include a "neutral" option based on input and feedback from school community members, and in particular, the school leaders that use the data to inform plans to improve school climate. Items on the surveys were carefully designed to be relevant to members of the school community and therefore respondents are expected to have either a generally positive or generally negative perception on topics measured in the items, even if those perceptions are not very strong. By removing a neutral option, school leaders are better able to understand how respondents are feeling and where improvements need to be made. Preliminary research suggests that removing a neutral option from surveys does not negatively impact the quality of the data collected. Similar instruments, including the U.S. Department of Education School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS), do not provide users with a "neutral" option. Instructions are provided on NJ SCI Survey pages to remind respondents they may skip any item on the survey for any reason, including if they do not know how to answer an item or would prefer not to. "Not Applicable" options are also provided for select items on the Staff Survey.

Are there items on diversity, equity, and inclusion on the survey?

While we do not extract a specific Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) domain, there are DEI items integrated within the domains for all respondent groups which will also be highlighted and reported in their own tab in the data report pages on the NJ SCI Platform. In addition, the data insights reported by the system will elevate patterns among demographic groups to provide additional equity-oriented data to inform discussions and decision-making.

Why are students asked about their gender on the NJ SCI Survey and what are their response options?

Research supports the importance of creating a safe, affirming, and inclusive environment through the implementation of best practices which support all students in feeling seen and valued for being their authentic selves. When adding demographic categories to the NJ SCI Survey, the developers recognized the importance of allowing students the flexibility to select a gender identity that best matches their own internal sense of who they are. Survey developers consulted with experts working in/with schools and related organizations to determine age-appropriate and inclusive

language for gender identity categories on the student surveys. Students can select all options that apply to how they describe themselves. For students in grades 3-5, the options are “Boy/Male; Girl/Female; I use a different word(s).” For students in grades 6-12, the options are Boy/Male; Girl/Female; I use a different word(s); Non-binary; Transgender.” All questions on the survey, including demographic questions, are voluntary, and instructions are provided on the survey pages to remind students that they can skip any question, including the question about their gender.

The [2018 Transgender Student Guidance for School Districts](#) from the New Jersey Department of Education supports schools in creating an inclusive environment in which transgender and gender nonconforming students feel safe and supported. Offering inclusive gender options on the survey for self-selection is one step toward fostering safe and affirming environments. The data from the survey can also be used by district and school leaders to assess how safe and supportive the learning environment is for *all* students, and to guide strategies, policies, and procedures to support a nondiscriminatory and inclusive environment for all members of the community. New Jersey law also requires that schools implement an inclusive curriculum, including LGBTQ topics and people, and it is expected that the age-appropriate terms provided for students as options on the survey’s gender item are familiar to them and have already been discussed in other contexts in school as part of standard educational practice.

It is recommended that schools and districts using the NJ SCI Survey provide open lines of communication and resources to parents or caregivers. As a reminder, downloadable sample letters to communicate with parents/caregivers about the survey include a link to preview all items on the student surveys and should be sent in advance of beginning administration of the student survey. The New Jersey Department of Education also provides [Transgender Guidance Resources](#) to support training and promote awareness.

What is the “Supports for Social and Emotional Learning” domain on the NJ SCI Survey actually measuring?

The NJ SCI Survey measures conditions in schools that support social and emotional skill development among students using a specially designed domain called “Supports for Social and Emotional Learning.” It has long been shown through research and practice that social-emotional and/or character development have a positive impact on a variety of outcomes related to school climate, individual student well-being and confidence, and achievement. The development of this new cutting-edge construct began in response to New Jersey’s development of [SEL Competencies and Sub-competencies](#) in 2017 and is informed by our work in schools and input from members of the educational community in the development of the new instrument. The NJ SCI Survey draws on the latest research and practice to ask about school-wide and classroom practices that help staff model and students develop and enact, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. In addition to their relationship with positive outcomes in school, these are critical skills to prepare students for success in their path after high school, and top skills that are sought by employers. Schools where SEL is infused and embedded across content areas and aspects of school life promote prosocial and inclusive behaviors, setting the stage for a better overall climate and supportive conditions for teaching and learning to occur.

The survey captures the perceptions of different groups about how comprehensively SEL is infused and embedded throughout the school day. It does not ask students questions about their own actions or beliefs, and the data are presented collectively so that individual responses cannot be identified or tracked over time. When goals are set related to this domain, schools can monitor the overall domain score for different respondent groups as well as individual items on the survey related to SEL implementation.

Some groups have mistaken the intent of the SEL competencies as being designed to teach students *what* to think and feel, instead of helping them to become more aware of their own thoughts and feelings, and how to self-regulate so they are responding to those thoughts and feelings appropriately in school. A component of what our survey measures is the extent to which groups like parents and caregivers have input on how SEL is taught, and how SEL has been adapted to meet the cultural needs of the community in a way that honors and values various beliefs and ways of being.

Can anyone identify respondents on the surveys?

The survey is anonymous (no names are collected at any time, and data are redacted for groups of fewer than ten respondents to protect anonymity), and participation is voluntary (a student, staff member, or parent/caregiver can opt out at any time without penalty during administration). All items are close-ended. “Not Applicable” options are available for select items and participants have the ability to skip any item.

Are there open-ended questions on the NJ SCI Survey?

The NJ SCI Survey has been designed to be anonymous, and open-ended questions give the respondent the ability to identify themselves or others either intentionally or unintentionally. Open-ended questions also may allow responses containing sensitive information which could invoke time-sensitive mandated reporting, intervention, and/or investigation processes. Given these considerations, the NJ SCI Survey does not contain open-ended questions however, supplemental resources to support school climate leadership teams in planning for and collecting qualitative data through interviews, focus groups, observations, etc., will be made available on the NJ SCI Platform at a later date.

How will the data from the NJ SCI Survey be used by Rutgers University? Will district data be shared?

The data collected through the NJ SCI Platform are stored on highly-secured servers located in the United States. The only people who will have access to your districts' data reports are district staff members authorized by the Superintendent, District Climate Coordinator and/or School Principal(s) or their designated Team Chair(s) through an invitation to the platform, Rutgers staff at the School Climate Transformation Project (consultants and researchers who are certified in handling sensitive data), and web developers who are similarly certified and experienced in managing data through their work on multiple projects with Rutgers University. The data from all participating schools will be combined and de-identified to not include school names, in order to be used to statistically validate the pilot survey and explore statewide trends.

While the New Jersey Department of Education sponsors the NJ SCI Platform, no individual school data will be shared with NJDOE. The department will have access to the names of districts which have authorized access to the NJ SCI Platform, but no additional information about those districts. De-identified and aggregated data will eventually be used to report statewide trends and insights to the NJDOE to support informed decision-making (see following question and answer).

Are benchmarking data available to compare how our school/district are doing with others?

Once a sufficiently representative sample of data are collected across the state, and the instrument's reliability over several administrations has been established, the possibility of providing normalizing data or benchmarks among comparable types of schools and districts will be explored. The NJ SCI Platform has been built with the capability to provide district level comparisons for all schools that administered the NJ SCI survey through the Data Collection and Reports workspace on district sites.

[Return to Table](#)

IV. Survey Administration and Reporting (Logistics)

Who can deploy the NJ SCI Survey in our school community?

In accordance with best practices for effective survey administration, we recommend that school team members with deployment permission (the Data Coordinator(s), Team Chair(s) and/or School Principals), deploy surveys for their respective schools. The Data Coordinator manages survey administration and other data collection and works closely with the School Principal/Team Champion and Team Chair to ensure efficient and effective data collection and analysis. Specifically, the Data Coordinator reviews the [NJ SCI Survey Administration Guidelines for Data Coordinators](#) and follows best practices guidance, including helping to schedule administration at the school, training staff to help collect student data, distributing survey links using sample letters, and monitoring data responses. For technical support on how to administer the NJ SCI Survey on the NJ SCI Platform, see the [Screencast Tutorial of NJ SCI Survey Deployment](#).

The NJ SCI Platform is designed to allow for district-level support and coordination while providing autonomy and flexibility to individual schools. Because surveys are deployed at the school-level, district users, including the District Climate Coordinator (DCC), will not see the "Deploy in My School" button in the table of available surveys unless they are a member of the School Climate Leadership Team in a respective school's site and designated as either Data Coordinator or Team Chair. District Climate Coordinators can support schools in their efforts to coordinate survey administration across the district to ensure they schedule on a similar time frame. If DCCs wish to support schools more directly, they should reach out to principals about joining their school/team site and elevating their Team Role to "Data Coordinator" to enable them to deploy surveys on the respective schools' sites.

How do participants access the survey?

The NJ SCI Survey can be completed using computers, tablets, smartphones, or other similar electronic devices. Given the responsive technology used on the NJ SCI Platform, and the need to protect anonymity of respondents, the NJ SCI Survey and other associated assessments cannot be completed using paper/pencil surveys.

The platform features tutorials and written guidance to facilitate the process of creating shareable anonymous survey links for each respondent group in the school. A school team member acting as the Data Coordinator (as well as the Principal/Team Champion and/or Team Chair) can set up a survey deployment by selecting a time frame and the versions of the survey to be administered (Students Grades 3-5, Students 6-12, Staff, Parents/caregivers). A unique password can be set for each respondent group, although generic passwords are generated by the system. The system creates links to access the surveys and provides auto-generated communications to respondents (including translated copies with auto-filled school-specific information about the survey, such as survey links, time frames, persons to contact). Response rates for all respondent groups are available on the platform while survey administration is open. Once schools are done with survey administration, they can close their links to generate and view data reports.

Can participants take the survey more than once?

There are limited situations where we encourage individuals to take the survey more than once. If a parent/caregiver has multiple children in the same building and feels the children have significantly different experiences of school climate, they may take it more than once to reflect those perceptions. If a staff member also has a child in the building, they may take both the staff survey and parent/caregiver survey.

The NJ SCI Survey is anonymous and answers to items cannot be traced back to an individual respondent. We recognize this may raise concerns around individuals who do not meet the criteria described above taking the survey more than once. While there is no way to prevent an individual from taking the survey more than once, our experience administering climate surveys for years has demonstrated that these circumstances are highly uncommon. As safeguards, the school can set relatively tight survey windows to prevent this activity: for example, giving staff a specific faculty meeting to complete the survey and changing the survey password before offering make-ups to those who

missed it. The same could be done for students, who should be taking the survey in the building, through an extended homeroom administration or class time, during a one or two-day survey window.

Should students who miss the survey be permitted to make it up?

Students who missed the planned survey administration time period may take the survey on subsequent days as long as the survey “End date(s)” has not passed (“End dates” can be extended if needed by editing a survey deployment). Schools may change the password before distributing the links to students who missed the original administration period to ensure their exclusive access to the survey. Supervision should always be provided for those students, which may mean allowing those students to report to an alternate centralized location during specials, study halls, or other periods at their discretion (such as an auditorium with a proctor). Ensure there is a staff member familiar with the survey who is available and on-call to answer questions or concerns from students during the make-up window. Students requiring additional support and/or accommodations may need different make-up circumstances as well. We recommend that students always take the survey when they are in the building, and as a reminder, the student survey is disabled between 6pm to 6am for new entries. Staff supporting student survey administration should review the following guidelines [here](#).

When and how will our district/schools receive our data reports for the NJ SCI Survey?

District and school leaders can check participation rates periodically within the NJ SCI Platform Survey Deployments tab on school and district sites and communicate reminders to take the survey. Once district and/or school leaders and team members have decided there is sufficient participation, they will be able to close the survey deployment by clicking the “Generate Reports” button in the school-level Survey Deployments tab and access the platform’s live reporting, data comparison, and analysis features. The data reporting features use automated and responsive technology to provide guidance, suggestions, and data insights to school climate teams as they navigate the reports and identify strengths and potential areas of need.

The NJ SCI Platform online system will store data and allow you to view results directly on the platform interface, along with access to data analysis activities and tools. For a preview of the reporting interface, see the [Screencast Tutorial of NJ SCI Survey Report Features](#). The data can be downloaded as a static PDF report if needed. Superintendents can request and complete a signed agreement to authorize the release of an Excel spreadsheet of raw data for a school(s) in the district, but demographic responses will not be released in order to protect anonymity.

Can the data be compared in the system across schools in the same district?

Members of the District Climate Leadership Team can compare domain and item mean scores and the number of respondents across schools in the district on the District Comparison tab in the Data Collection and Reports Workspace in the district site. District Climate Leadership Team members, including School Principals on the team, can select from a list of available deployments across schools and determine which they want to view side-by-side. Alternatively, users can select to view Comparison Reports which meet pre-determined criteria of being collected within the same deployment or being the most recently collect data in each school in the same school year. Comparison Reports contain district-wide averages on domains and items to support district-level data discussions and strategic planning. Members of the district team can also access each school’s data reports through the school’s site to view additional data, including frequency distributions for items and domains, as well as disaggregated mean scores.

Do parents and caregivers need to provide consent for their child(ren) to take the NJ SCI Survey?

School staff are responsible for administering the NJ SCI Survey to respondents using the survey links and support materials provided through the NJ SCI Platform. As such, it is the school’s responsibility to decide how to inform parents and caregivers and handle consent related to their child’s participation in the NJ SCI Survey. Rutgers University does not

provide or require any permission forms for surveys used for standard educational practice as part of our project/the SCTP. However, we provide guidance for notifying parents/caregivers about the survey which consider New Jersey statutory law. The following is an excerpt from the Survey Administration Guidelines that is available to schools on the NJ SCI Platform:

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 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.

Why is it recommended that parents and caregivers be notified about student surveys at least two weeks prior to their start date?

The two-week recommendation and supportive materials we offer are based on requirements in an updated NJ statute related to parental consent (see question above). You should defer to your local board and counsel when complying with laws or policies related to parental notification/consent, as we cannot interpret the law on behalf of schools/districts.

In the platform, you have the ability to select unique Start and End Dates for the different respondent groups so you can begin survey administration of staff and parents/caregivers earlier or later than the students, as needed.

How can we share the data from the NJ SCI Platform with the broader community?

Development of a comprehensive strategic plan requires ongoing communication and collaboration with school community members at various stages. The NJ SCI Platform provides learning modules, resources, and suggested monthly activities to help with each step in the process, including communicating with staff and parents about survey outcomes, potential school climate goals, and plans of action. There are also several ways to share your data with other school community members outside of the team (e.g., community members, board members) without authorizing their access to the platform. These include exporting PDF copies of the data reports, taking screenshots of pages/disaggregated views of interactive reporting feature, and other data display features (e.g., graphs) that the system generates.

[Return to Table](#)

V. Pilot and Validation

How did the survey perform in the pilot study, and when will it be finalized?

Over 30,000 respondents, including students (in grades 3-12), staff, and parents/caregivers, from 25 districts of varying sizes and characteristics across the state, participated in the pilot of the survey in Spring 2022. Analyses were conducted to test the validity of the survey - meaning how well the items measure the domains or factors of school climate they are intended to measure. Results from the analyses were used to make minor modifications and improvements to the NJ SCI Survey for all respondent groups. Overall, there were no conceptual changes to the NJ SCI Survey domains, in other words, no domains were removed, and items within domains were not combined or moved to a different domain.

Additionally, no new domains were created. Some minor wording changes were made to help clarify the intent of the item and/or to align more closely with language used for another respondent group.

Items were removed to avoid redundancy where applicable and to reduce the length of the survey and time needed to complete the survey. Items were also removed if the responses were similar across respondents (little variation), a notable number of respondents skipped the item (which could indicate they were unable to answer or it did not apply to them), and/or based on input from community members.

In Fall 2022, the revised NJ SCI Survey will be validated, which means data from respondents will be used to repeat the analyses described above to confirm the instrument is still measuring intended school climate concepts. It is expected that the final NJ SCI Survey will have few, if any, changes as compared with the validation instrument. The final NJ SCI Survey will be available in January 2023.

[Return to Table](#)

VI. **Data Ownership and Security**

Where and how are the data collected through the NJ SCI Platform stored?

The data collected through the NJ SCI Platform are stored on highly-secured servers located in the United States. The only people who will have access to your districts' data reports are district staff members authorized by the Superintendent and/or Principal(s) through invitation to the platform, Rutgers staff at the School Climate Transformation Project (consultants and researchers who are certified in handling sensitive data), and web developers who are similarly certified and experienced in managing data through their work on multiple projects with Rutgers University. Aggregated data sets (de-identified to not include school names) will be used to statistically validate the pilot survey. The following technical information on data storage and security appears in the "Terms of Use for NJ SCI Platform Use" for superintendents:

"Data Security. 1. Rutgers will implement and maintain reasonable administrative, physical and technical safeguards ("Safeguards") which attempt to prevent any collection, use or disclosure of, or access to District Data that this Agreement does not expressly authorize, including, without limitation, an information security program that meets commercially reasonable industry practice to safeguard District Data. Such information security program includes: (a) physical security of all premises in which District Data will be processed and/or stored; and (b) reasonable precautions taken with respect to the employment of, access given to, and education and training of any and all personnel furnished or engaged by Rutgers to perform any part of the services hereunder. 2. Rutgers has implemented administrative, technical, and physical security procedures to protect information stored in our servers, which are located in the United States. It uses security safeguards such as physical access controls to buildings and files, at-rest data encryption, and in transit data encryption using HTTPS with TLS 1.3 to help prevent unauthorized access to the information it maintains. Despite this, neither the Internet nor any data storage system can be guaranteed to be 100% secure."

How can data be removed or deleted from the system?

As outlined in the Terms of Use signed by Superintendents, Charter School Lead persons, and Chief School Administrators, data entered in the system by district and school users, including survey data, are property of the school district. As such, the NJ SCI Platform enables users with appropriate permission levels to remove and delete data. Data removal and deletion should only be done when absolutely necessary, and it involves a system of checks and warnings to ensure data are not accidentally deleted, as they are unable to be restored.

Superintendents are the only users in the system with the authority to delete data on behalf of the district. School Principals have the authority to remove NJ SCI Survey deployments, including associated data, using the trash can icon that appears within their view of the Data Collection & Reports workspace, under the Survey Deployments tab. This function may be used if a survey deployment was created erroneously, or a respondent group was accidentally left out of a deployment. Superintendents can also see the trash can icon within a school's workspace to remove data from their respective school site; however, Superintendents should check in with School Principals to notify them if data will be removed from their school site. Superintendents can also permanently delete a deployment and any associated data that were removed from the school workspace in their district-level Manage Deleted Data Workspace. Any data deleted by School Principals will go to the Manage Deleted Data workspace for the Superintendent to permanently delete if needed. Data deleted from this workspace by the Superintendent are automatically deleted from the servers, and all back up data is manually purged. All data permanently deleted by the Superintendent/CSA in the Manage Deleted Data Workspace are not recoverable.

[Return to Table](#)