The Colorado Education Initiative (CEI) developed Colorado’s Student Perception Survey (SPS) in 2012 to provide teachers with actionable student feedback. One of the most common questions from educators is: How did CEI engage students in creating the SPS?

One of the key purposes of the SPS is to provide students with a formal, fair, and valid mechanism to give teachers feedback. CEI recognized the importance of student involvement in testing, evaluating, and refining the survey, and engaged students throughout the entire process.

Think-aloud interviews
An important step in developing assessments and surveys is ensuring that respondents are interpreting the questions as intended. One way to ensure clarity is through think-aloud interviews, where respondents are asked to talk through each question and their response as they complete the survey.

For each grade span (grades 3-5 and grades 6-12), CEI selected students from various grade levels and demographic areas, including students from each of the following groups:

- Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch
- Students of color
- ELLs
- Students with disabilities
- Geographic diversity with regard to region (e.g., across school districts) and setting (e.g., urban, suburban, and rural)

Overall, the results from the think-aloud interviews were positive, but also resulted in minor wording changes to survey questions. Below are some direct quotes from students who participated in the think-aloud interviews:

- **My teacher uses a lot of different ways to explain things.** “Definitely. If one person says they do not understand, she tells three or four other ways to explain it, and even if no one raises their hand she still gives other ways of explaining because she knows it can be embarrassing to say you don’t understand.” (fifth-grader)

- **I feel like an important part of my classroom community.** “Always. This means to help learn and support my class, be kind and respectful. I feel like my class is a good community.” (third-grader)

- **My teacher accepts nothing less than my best effort.** “Always. He would always know for every student, and especially for me, if I was distracted or not engaged, or if I didn’t get the grade I deserved on the test he would ask me if I was making wise choices.” (11th-grader)

Open-ended responses
During the spring pilot, students also shared open-ended responses to the question, “Do you have any other thoughts or feedback for your teacher?” This question was initially included to evaluate the tenor of student comments and determine if students were taking the survey process seriously. In fact, teachers reported that it provided such powerful feedback that it was formally integrated into Colorado’s Student Perception Survey.
Quotes from open-ended responses
Below are some direct quotes from open-ended responses:

• “… You are the best teacher this year for me. I’m a very visual learner and all the experiment[s] help me understand. So thanks for actually getting me to like science again.”

• “She tends to teach with just speaking and not much examples/doing. ... I often have a hard time understanding the tougher concepts because of this.”

• “My teacher understands that people learn in different ways and so she does a great job of challenging the advanced kids, giving the average kids work for their level of understanding, and giving the struggling kids plenty of reassuring help and encouragement.”