

How do I know that the survey is fair?

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 do I know that the survey is fair?

CEI engaged in a rigorous survey development process and took several steps to ensure that the SPS is a fair instrument. CEI worked to ensure that the survey would not systematically advantage or punish a particular teacher based on factors other than educator effectiveness. CEI also made efforts to design a survey that wasn't too difficult for an educator to receive positive feedback or too easy so that *all* teachers were rated favorably by students. Finally, fairness is not simply about outcomes, but also about process. Teachers were deeply involved in creating and refining the survey.

Representation

Sixteen Colorado school districts piloted the SPS, representing various geographic locations, sizes, levels of technological access, and support staff structures. CEI also engaged [teachers](#) and [students](#) in the development process to ensure that items and administration procedures were meeting the needs of the field. Involving diverse stakeholders helps to assure that the SPS can be applied fairly in Colorado's different educational settings.

Sampling and assignment

Many other states and districts use a simpler sampling approach (e.g., sampling an entire class period for all teachers in a school). However, many Colorado teachers believed that approach would skew their data and could result in very small sample sizes. To ensure a more equitable representation of students, CEI used a robust sampling framework focused on homeroom teacher evaluations at the elementary level and random assignment of students within each teacher's course load at the secondary level. This approach helps to assure that a teacher's results are based on a reasonable sample size and include a representative group of students from across a teacher's classes.

Varied levels of difficulty

Like more traditional assessments, the SPS was designed to include questions with varying levels of difficulty. With this design, even students who are inclined to answer negatively have at least a few questions that they can answer positively, and very positive students have a few items that they may answer more critically. This approach ensures that the survey can measure student experiences across a range of educators, and teachers receive feedback that is varied and useful.

Grade-appropriate surveys

To ensure students were able to respond fairly to questions, two surveys were developed — for grades 3-5 and for grades 6-12 — using appropriate language and structure to further assure fairness across teacher groups. An important step in developing assessments and surveys is to ensure 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. Overall, the results from the think-aloud interviews were very positive and encouraging. Students of all backgrounds overwhelmingly engaged with the questions and provided thoughtful feedback about their teachers' instructional practices. See the [overview of student feedback on teaching](#) for more information about the think-aloud process.

Testing conditions

Proctors should feel comfortable providing any accommodations that students need to access the SPS. Districts and schools should use the Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) of students with disabilities to identify appropriate accommodations. Because the survey does not test students' academic knowledge, proctors can read the entire survey out loud to any group of students. In fact, CEI recommends that the entire survey be read aloud to elementary students. Proctors can help students with questions they have about the survey as long as the questions are not about the teacher being reviewed.

Consideration of student demographics

To ensure that the survey results are not simply driven by student demographics, CEI analyzed the relationships between teachers' SPS scores and the percentages of their students who were ethnic minorities or English Language Learners (ELLs). The results provide no indication that student demographics are meaningfully related to teacher-level SPS scores. There are very few statistically significant relationships (and among the handful of significant relationships, they are consistently quite weak), suggesting that classroom demographics are not predictors of student survey results. Teachers' results are likely driven by factors other than student demographics.



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We encourage you to review the answers to other common questions about the SPS and explore other resources associated with student perception surveys. Visit the [Student Perception Survey Toolkit](#) for more information.

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