

Guidelines and Best Practices for Surveying Young Learners

Students of all ages are able to provide helpful feedback about their classroom experiences for use by their teachers. In order to solicit feedback from students, we encourage districts to create policies and instruments that are developmentally appropriate for the age and abilities of the students in question. Over the course of the past two years, the Colorado Legacy Foundation (CLF) has written, piloted, and validated two surveys that can be used to inform conversations about educator effectiveness in Colorado: the [Student Perception Survey \(SPS\)](#) and the [Teacher Perception Survey \(TPS\)](#). The Student Perception Survey is currently developed for students in grades 3-12 to provide feedback to their teachers in order to improve practice and inform instruction. CLF currently has no plans to develop a survey for students in kindergarten through grade 2 (K-2), as creating and properly administering a valid and reliable measure of student perceptions for high-stakes use in teacher evaluations is difficult generally, and especially difficult with regard to the very youngest students.

Notably, younger learners may not be able to express themselves on a survey in the same way that older students can. Using surveys and other instruments that are developed for older students may not be suitable for younger audiences and could lead to biased or unreliable results, so interpreting surveys given to K-2 students in the same way as results from older students can potentially lead to inaccurate conclusions about teacher performance.

EXAMPLES OF SURVEYS FOR K-2 STUDENTS

There are few surveys currently available for use with K-2 students (e.g., [Tripod Early Elementary Student Perception Survey](#)); several other districts and states are also working on developing their own K-2 surveys.

GUIDELINES AND BEST PRACTICES FOR DEVELOPING A K-2 SURVEY

If resources allow, your district may also choose to develop and administer your own surveys. In this case, we recommend you follow guidelines both for general survey development *and* for engaging younger learners. Although the financial and human resources investment is considerable, developing surveys locally through research-based processes can improve the likelihood that stakeholders believe in the instrument. Districts considering this route should consult trained researchers/scholars with survey development expertise; there are also many practical resources available online (e.g., [Gehlbach & Brinkworth, 2011](#)) and [technical reports](#) that summarize survey development processes. For K-2 survey development in particular, early childhood teachers can be an invaluable resource in the survey item development process, as they are able to guide survey developers in choosing questions and answer choices that are easily understood by students.

Though we suggest you consult both current research literature and reach out to experts in early childhood education throughout your district, we also make the following general suggestions about surveying K-2 students:

- Younger students do not have the same breadth of vocabulary as older students. We suggest that you use simple language for your survey questions that will be familiar to your students.
- Best practices in survey development include conducting “[think-aloud interviews](#)”. These interviews allow you to better understand how students are interpreting the questions that you ask.
- Rather than relying on students’ ability to read and interpret survey questions, surveys for K-2 students should be read aloud to each student outside the classroom and the proctor should record each student’s responses completely and accurately.
- Though students should be surveyed by an adult they know and trust, the proctor administering the survey should be someone other than the students’ current teacher.
- Similarly, we suggest that you do not survey students in groups. When younger students are asked questions in groups, they may be more likely to simply agree with previous statements rather than provide new information.

- The opinions of all students should be considered when providing feedback to teachers from their students. Thus, every effort should be made to translate the survey into other languages that students in your district may be using at home. Moreover, every reasonable accommodation should be made to include students with developmental disabilities or behavioral issues. For example, for students who have demonstrated difficulty with tasks that require extended focused attention, consider dividing the survey into smaller sections of approximately five minutes in length to be completed over several sessions. For students who require frequent physical activity, consider providing short guided movement breaks every few questions. Similarly, some students respond well to having an item to hold and manipulate, such as a stress ball.

ALTERNATIVE AND SUPPLEMENTAL STRATEGIES

Beyond the use of student surveys, there are a variety of approaches currently available that can be used to give feedback to K-2 teachers. Choosing the best approach will depend on the relationship the school has with the surrounding community and what communication methods are currently in place at a given school. A few of these approaches are:

- **Parent surveys:** Parents are a key source of information about their child's classroom. There are a variety of instruments that have been developed to survey parents both about their teachers and their principals: The [K12 Insight Parent Survey for Principal Evaluation](#), [NYC DOE Principal Survey for Parents](#) or the [Principal Evaluation Tripod School Perception Survey](#). If surveys are administered online, ensure that all parents in your school have access to a paper copy or a device that can complete the survey online. Note that many families use mobile phones to access the internet; thus, each parent survey should be tested on a variety of operating systems so as to be available to the greatest number of parents possible. For parents who do not speak English, the survey should be translated to encourage participation.
- **Guided class conversations:** Either the classroom teacher or another instructor that students are familiar with can guide an informal classroom conversation that the teacher can use to inform instruction. Questions could include "What types of activities do you like in this class?" or "What activities do you not like very much?" Make sure to address a variety of teaching behaviors, including both classroom community building and instructional practices (e.g., whether the teacher explains things in a way students can understand). Focusing questions around particular issues or topics that are of the most interest to the teacher and/or school is ideal.