

# Listen: Interviewing Students

## Facilitator Guidance Document

- Student Interviews are a core component of the improvement planning process. Student Interviews provide a means of better understanding the student experience and allow an opportunity for improvement planning team members to develop empathy and gain insights into how practices and initiatives are being received by students. Through the listening process that comes from Student Interviews, the improvement planning team can better develop a plan that considers the hopes and needs of the students. Schools identified for TSI, ATSI, and CSI support will be required to use this process with their SCEP Development Team.

- Student interviews are designed to occur after the *Envision* and *Analyze* phases of the Improvement Plan Development Process. The interviews are scheduled to occur at this phase s92 reWI (o)-5 (-)-219.0B05 (-)T prove

1. Team members identify topics to be explored, create a set of questions for each topic, and arrange a schedule so that students will be able to select the breakout room

2. The students interviewed are representative of the student body, and when applicable, include a cross-section of students from both the subgroup(s) for which the school has been identified and other subgroups.
3. The students selected should include those who have a range of academic and behavioral (e.g., attendance, discipline) successes and struggles.
4. Not all students are interviewed together; interviews may occur in small groups, breakout rooms, or individually.
5. Students are provided the questions in advance.
6. After the interviews have been conducted, the Team discusses what was learned.
7. A student survey cannot be used as a substitute for Student Interviews.

Interviews provide an opportunity to better understand the perspectives and experiences of specific students. As the team listens to students, it is important that diversity, equity, and inclusion are considered throughout the interview process.

In addition to making sure that the students interviewed will allow for a diverse range of perspectives, teams will want to consider how the insights shared by students may or may not yield insights into the school's efforts to promote equity and inclusion. The following reflective questions are offered as suggestions for teams to consider as they interview students:

- In group sessions, how are we providing space for all to share?
- Are we encouraging certain answers over others? How might we show that we value the perspectives of all that share with us, even when what they share may not be popular?
- How are making sure that some voices are not dominating the conversation at the expense of others?
- How are we making decisions about whether what we are hearing is one individual's experience or something that extends beyond that individual?
- Are there voices that might be overlooked/unheard that we can invite into the conversation?

Teams may also find the Department's resources on [Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Practices](#) and the Board of Regents' [Framework on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in New York's Schools: A Call to Action](#) useful in exploring this topic further.

Teams are encouraged to develop the questions most appropriate for their students and the approach toward interviews the team has selected. Below are potential questions that the team may find helpful when developing its own set of questions. Remember, please so that they can provide full responses that are reflective of their experience and perspective.

We've had to do a number of things differently than how we used to do things before the pandemic. What are the things that you feel like you've lost from the pandemic?

What are the ways that you've seen yourself grow or learn new things over the past year?

What have you learned about yourself in the past year?

What are some things you think are important for all teachers to know about what it is like to be a student at our school?

What are the things that our school is doing new this year that should be continued next year? Why are these important to you?

What are your worries for next year?

What are things we could do to help students feel better about being at school?

I want you to think about the best day you've had at our school. What made it your best day?

I am going to tell you a statement, and I want you to think of what comes to mind: "Kids like me are allowed to be ourselves at this school." What do you think about when you hear those words?

In your life both in and out of school, what pressures do you feel to do w

## STUDENT INTERVIEW PRACTICES



*(adapted from Everyone Graduates Center)*

Designing a student-centered plan requires understanding the students and families we serve. Listening to our students with empathy allows us to understand their motivations, emotions, behaviors, and choice

students being interviewed throughout the process, particularly with elementary school children. While the [Guidance on Listening to Students with Empathy](#) offers suggestions for all students, Improvement Plan Development Teams working with younger students may want to consider the following:

- Elementary school teams should plan to speak to students in the upper range of the grades served. For example, a K-2 school should plan to speak with 2<sup>nd</sup> graders, while a K-5 school will likely plan to speak with 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders.
- Younger students may have a harder time transitioning between topics; minimize abrupt transitions to the greatest extent possible.
- While these strategies are effective for all students, the use of verbal and non-verbal encouragement will likely have the greatest impact with younger students. Use warm body language, and other strategies such as using the interviewee's name and providing encouraging feedback for effort (e.g., "I can see you're thinking hard"). Use the child's own terminology previously offered when possible. Use neutral, non-coercive techniques to indicate that you are listening, such head-nodding, incorporating, "Mm-hmm," and "Uh-huh" as the child is talking, and maintaining an attentive demeanor.
- Younger students may benefit from a "practice" phase in which the session begins with an open-ended question unrelated to the questions identified by the improvement planning team (e.g., "I am trying to understand what it is like to be a student here. Can you tell me about what you did right before our meeting?") Having the opportunity to provide a narrative regarding a neutral topic introduces students to this style of interaction and allows interviewers to demonstrate their own listening skills, build trust and rapport, gain a sense of children's language skills and development, and ease them into an interaction where elaborate responses are encouraged. Just two to three minutes can be spent on the "practice" phase. Any event discussed should be pleasant (or neutral) and should be a specific episode with a defined time frame, rather than general questions about what "usually hap