

Listen: Interviewing Students

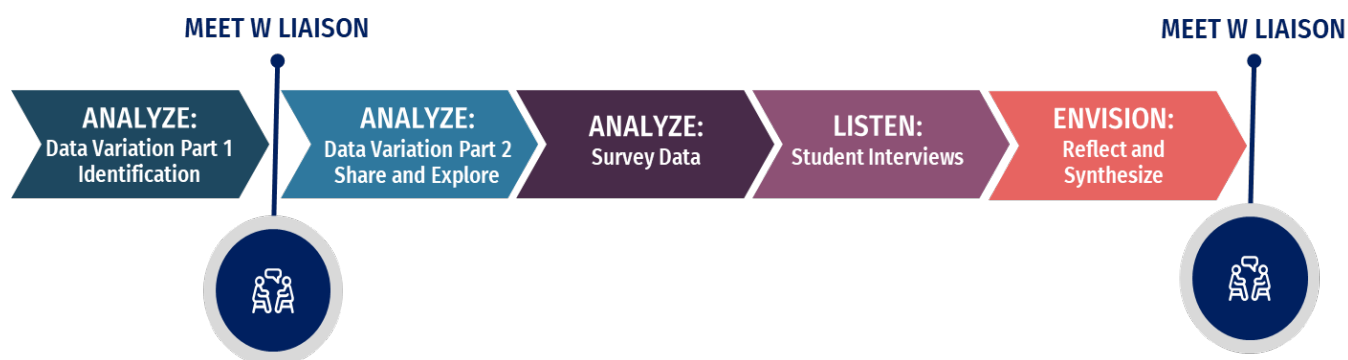
Facilitator Guidance Document

Why It's Important

- Student interviews are a vital part of the improvement planning process. They help teams better understand the student experience and develop empathy, ensuring that the voices of students shape the improvement plan.

How the Interviews Fit into the Improvement Plan Development Process

- Student interviews are designed to occur after the *Analyze* components of the Five-Part Needs Assessment. The interviews are scheduled to occur at this phase so that they may provide an opportunity to learn more about some of the themes that emerged during the *Analyze* activities.



- Teams are encouraged to reconnect with the students as the plan is written to ensure that the plan is reflective of the responses students provided.

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Ways to Organize

School teams can arrange the interviews in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to:

- **Individual Interviews:** Team members conduct interviews with several students at a time.
- **Group Interviews:** Team members work in pairs or triads to interview small groups of students (See Example #1).
- **Topic-Based Breakout Rooms:** Students select breakout rooms based on topics of interest (See Example #2).
- **Student-Generated Topics:** Students suggest topics and attend multiple asynchronous sessions (See Example #3).

EXAMPLE #1: All Students Asked Same Questions

1. Select students to interview.
2. Group students and send interview questions in advance.
3. Team members conduct interviews.
4. Share findings within the team.

EXAMPLE #2: Students Select Groups to Join Based on Topics

1. Team identifies topics and creates questions.
2. Students join breakout rooms based on their topic interests.
3. Teams discuss the topics as per the schedule.

Variation 1 – longer discussion on single topic				Variation 2 – shorter discussion on multiple topics				Variation 3 – shorter discussion, with some topics repeating				
30 mins	Topic A	Topic B	Topic C	15 mins	Topic A	Topic B	Topic C	15 mins	Topic A	Topic B	Topic C	
				15 mins	Topic D	Topic E	Topic F	15 mins	Topic A	Topic B	Topic D	Topic E

Note: These are merely examples. The school would select the number of topics appropriate.

EXAMPLE #3: Students Identify Topics and Attend Multiple Sessions When Interested

1. Survey students in advance for preferred topics.
2. Team reviews results and schedules discussions.
3. Share session details and questions with students, allowing them to attend multiple sessions.
4. Use breakout rooms if needed for larger groups.

Example #3 – Students have the opportunity to identify topics and attend multiple sessions.	
April 26, 2 p.m.	Topic A
April 28, 4 p.m.	Topic B
April 29, 3 p.m.	Topic C
April 30, 2 p.m.	Topic D
April 30, 3:30 p.m.	Topic E

Minimum Requirements for Those Identified for CSI, ATSI, and TSI

For schools identified for CSI, ATSI, or TSI support, the following minimum criteria must be met:

1. Interview between 10–25 students.
2. Ensure a representative sample of students, including relevant subgroups.
3. Include a mix of students with varied academic and behavioral experiences.
4. Conduct interviews in small groups, breakout rooms, or individually.
5. Provide questions in advance.
6. After interviews, discuss findings as a team.
7. A student survey cannot replace interviews.

Considerations to Promote Equity and Inclusion

Student interviews are an opportunity to understand diverse perspectives. It's important to be inclusive throughout the process. Reflect on these questions as you design and conduct your interviews:

- Are we creating space for all students to share their perspectives?
- How do we ensure we value all answers, even those that may be unpopular?
- Are some voices dominating the conversation? How can we address this?
- Are we distinguishing between individual experiences and broader trends?
- Are there overlooked voices we can invite to participate?

Crafting Questions

Teams are encouraged to develop the questions most appropriate for their students. When developing questions, consider ways to incorporate what the team identified during the **Data Variation** and **Survey** analysis discussions to help the team better understand root causes. Below are potential questions that the team may find helpful when developing its own set of questions. Remember, please **share the questions in advance with students** so that they can provide full responses that are reflective of their experience and perspective.

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 signals do you look for to let you know that you are on the right track or off-track in school?

What are your worries for next year?

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

What questions would you like to ask your teachers? Why?

I am going to tell you a statement, and I want you to think of what comes to mind: "There are adults in this school that look out for kids like me." What does that make you think of?

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

If you wanted adults to know one thing about you as a student (or as a teenager), what would you tell them?

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 well? What pressures do you feel to NOT do well?

STUDENT INTERVIEW PRACTICES

Guidance on Listening to Students with Empathy

(adapted from Everyone Graduates Center)

To create an effective student-centered plan, it's essential to understand the students and families we serve. Listening to students with empathy helps us grasp their motivations, emotions, behaviors, and decisions, offering insights into what they think and why. The goal of Student Interviews is to better understand the student experience.

Guidelines for Listening and Interviewing

1. **Ask "Why" Often:** Even if you think you understand, always seek deeper insight.
2. **Encourage Descriptions:** Use prompts like "Can you tell me more?" to get specific examples and details.
3. **Avoid Generalities:** Ask for concrete examples, not vague terms like "usually."
4. **Observe Nonverbal Cues:** Pay attention to body language and inconsistencies for deeper understanding.
5. **Avoid Yes/No Questions:** Encourage examples and stories instead of simple answers.
6. **Allow Silence:** Give students time to think and avoid suggesting answers.
7. **Record Responses:** One person should ask questions, while another records responses.
8. **Acknowledge "Bombed" Questions:** If a question doesn't work, ask the student for a better question.
9. **Ask for Solutions:** If a student identifies a problem, ask how they would handle it.
10. **Ensure One Speaker:** Make sure only one person speaks at a time and prevent interruptions.
11. **Balance Participation:** Ensure all students have a chance to speak and be heard.

Interview Etiquette

- **Introduce Yourself:** Briefly introduce who you are and why you're conducting the interview.
- **Explain the Purpose:** Tell students their responses will inform a plan that reflects their hopes and needs, and that their identities will remain anonymous.
- **Build Rapport:** Take a moment to make the student feel comfortable.
- **Thank Students:** Always thank them for their time and participation once the interview ends.

Interviewing Younger Children

For schools identified for TSI, ATSI, and CSI support, it's essential to adjust the interview process for younger children. Consider the following:

- **Select Older Students:** Focus on students in the upper grades (e.g., 2nd graders in K-2 schools or 4th and 5th graders in K-5 schools).
- **Minimize Abrupt Transitions:** Avoid sudden topic shifts to help younger students stay engaged.
- **Use Verbal and Non-Verbal Encouragement:** Use positive body language, the student's name, and feedback to support them (e.g., "I see you're thinking hard").
- **Practice Phase:** Begin with an open-ended question unrelated to the main interview topics to help younger students adjust (e.g., "What did you do before this meeting?"). This helps build rapport and makes them comfortable.
- **Emphasize No "Right Answers":** Remind students that there are no right answers and that they are the experts in this interview.

Elementary school teams may find the ["Imagining September" K-5 slide deck](#) designed by MIT researchers to be a helpful resource as they consider the appropriate entry points for conversation.