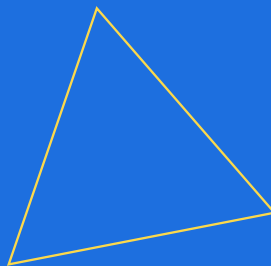
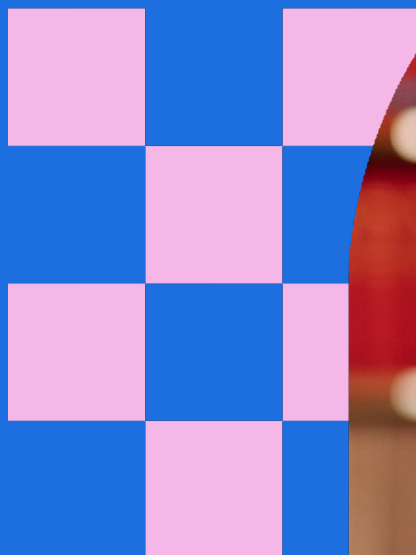


2025

State of the Student Experience

Authors Dr. Leila Nuland, Lena Munzer, Justo Yanez, Seth Swanson, Julia Temple
and Sucheta Bangalore

Foreword by Dr. Mort Sherman



Foreword by **Mort Sherman**

How humbling and eye-opening it was to hear a trusted colleague and leader say, “You blew it. You missed the most important set of voices!”

Just a few days after the Columbine tragedy, we pulled together what we thought were the important points of view to help the community come to terms with what had happened during that awful school shooting. The Mayor, Chief of Police, Sheriff, head of the hospital, teachers, other local leaders, and prominent mental health specialists all gathered on stage. And me, the then Superintendent of Schools in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

What was so clearly missing from that stage? Students!

It seems obvious that we should have included student voices on that stage in front of the thousands gathered in the school auditorium. I certainly included student voices previously in advisory groups, walk-throughs, and school cafeteria chats. However, listening to student perspectives was not a regular and formal part of the equation for ongoing school and district learning.

As a follow-up, I reached out to Ron Ferguson, who I considered an education rock star, to calmly and professionally guide us through the 7Cs Survey (formerly known as the Tripod 7Cs Survey). We included the voices of students and teachers. We led community conversations with parents. The results were candidly discussed.

In my next district, we also brought Dr. Ferguson in to lead conversations. We added student voices to our regular school board meetings, included monthly district-wide superintendent student advisory meetings, and added student voices to the gathering of information during our walk-throughs. We ensured the confidentiality of our data by presenting aggregate data to our stakeholders and confidential information about teaching practices to the teachers for their learning and growth.

Student voice and agency are not buzzwords added to our strategic plans. The essential services we provide as educators for students, families, and communities are built on the core beliefs we bring to our profession: trust, respect, responsibility, and commitment to serve every learner. Each year as a superintendent, I visited as many PTAs as I could, and asked the families what they wanted for their children when they graduated from our high schools. The answers were uniform. Parents and guardians said they wanted graduates to be good people, healthy, good decision makers, who cared for themselves and others. Some would share that they wanted their students to obtain good grades, be strong test takers, and get into college; however, all of that was in the context of what they wanted for their children as participating, productive, caring, literate citizens in our democracy.

The 7Cs Survey constructs (Care, Confer, Captivate, Clarify, Consolidate, Challenge, and Classroom Management) are a framework for measuring what we care about in education. By taking the time to gather student perspective data through the 7Cs Survey, we can create better educational experiences for our students.

Executive Summary

In today's evolving educational landscape, school leaders are challenged to improve teaching quality and student outcomes in more dynamic and complex ways than ever before. While traditional metrics like test scores and teacher observations offer useful data, they often overlook a critical perspective: the student experience.

This report makes the case for systematically collecting and analyzing student perception data using the research-backed 7Cs Survey framework to drive meaningful improvements in teaching and classroom culture.

Drawing from both research and real-world implementation in diverse districts, we show how student voice can be a powerful catalyst for transformation. Schools that effectively leverage the 7Cs Survey data have seen measurable gains in instructional quality, student engagement, and academic outcomes.

With millions of student responses collected, our team offers unique insights into how K-12 leaders can use this data to enhance learning environments.

This report includes national findings and highlights case studies from Washington County Schools and Harrisburg School District. These examples demonstrate how integrating student voice into continuous improvement efforts leads to targeted professional learning, improved classroom practices, and ultimately, better student achievement.

Key Findings



Student Voice Drives Improvement:

The 7Cs Survey provides unfiltered insights into learning experiences, leading to measurable growth in teaching quality, student outcomes, and school culture.



Disparities in Student Experiences:

While gender differences were minimal, racial and ethnic disparities emerged, highlighting the survey's role in helping educators address demographic differences and improve student experiences.



Female Students Had Greater Continuity in Experience:

Disaggregated data reveals that female students experienced smaller changes in their 7Cs scores from pre- to post-COVID compared to male students, across all survey levels.



Student Performance Gaps in Perception:

Across all grade levels, high-performing students consistently rated their teachers more favorably than low-performing peers, with Middle School showing the greatest increase in this disparity post-COVID.



Younger Students Faced Greater Disruption:

While Upper Elementary students experienced a slight decline in average scores post-COVID, Middle and High School students showed overall gains, reflecting the pandemic's disproportionate impact on younger learners.



Positive Instructional Experiences in Secondary Settings:

Although Upper Elementary students consistently rated the 7Cs constructs higher than older students, their scores declined post-COVID—particularly in “Personal Support”—while High School students showed notable gains in “Curricular Support,” suggesting more positive instructional experiences in secondary settings.

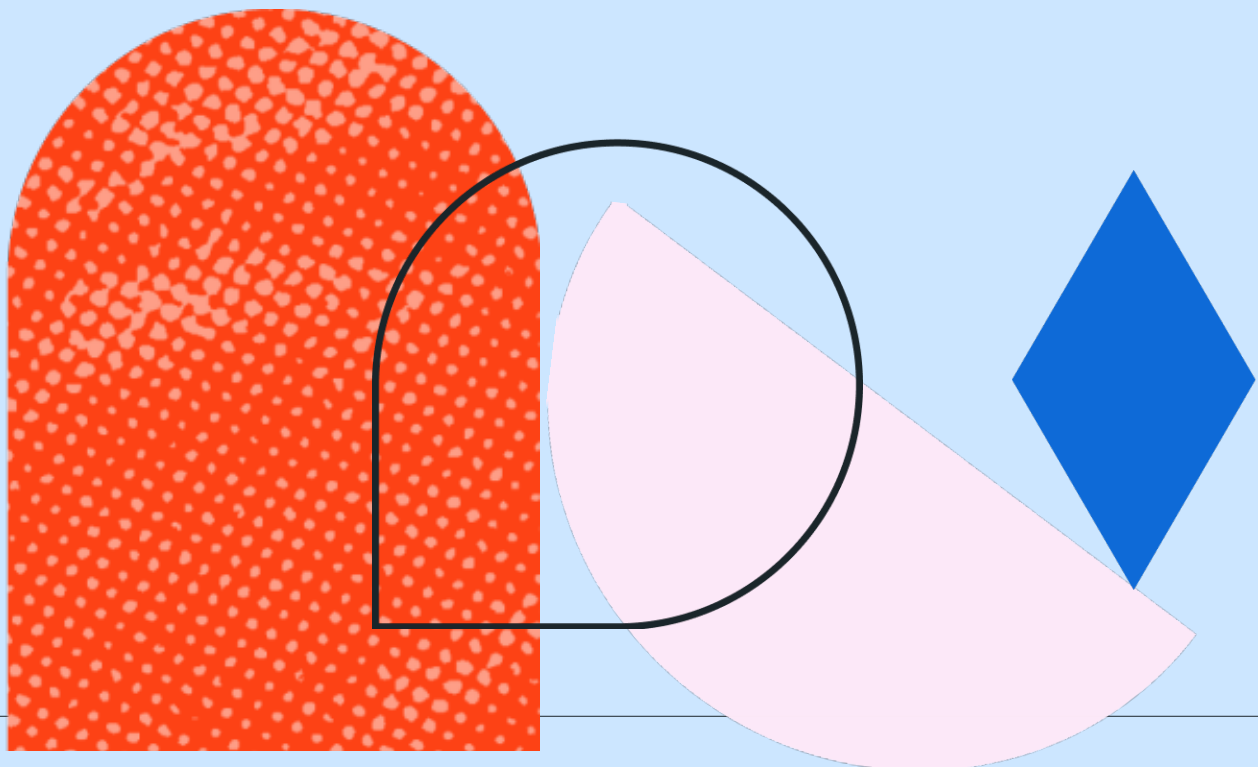
What is Student Voice and Why Does It Matter?

Each student brings unique strengths and challenges to their education. Student voice provides insight into their experiences, encompassing interactions, environments, and relationships—beyond just academics. It reflects emotional well-being, engagement, and belonging. In today’s evolving educational landscape, listening to students is essential for meaningful improvement. Their feedback offers an unfiltered view of teaching quality and learning dynamics, guiding efforts to enhance education effectively.

Ways to Gather Student Voice:

- **Surveys & Feedback Forms** – Anonymous or open-response surveys help capture student perspectives on teaching, learning, and school culture.
- **Student Focus Groups** – Small group discussions encourage deeper insights and honest dialogue.
- **Classroom Observations & Reflections** – Allowing students to share their experiences through journals, reflections, or discussion prompts.
- **Student Advisory Committees** – Giving students a formal role in school decision-making fosters agency and leadership.
- **One-on-One Check-Ins** – Regular teacher-student conversations build trust and provide individualized insights.
- **Digital Tools & Polls** – Quick pulse checks using technology (e.g., Google Forms, Padlet, or Mentimeter) can gather real-time feedback.

By incorporating these strategies, schools can create a culture of listening, ensuring that students’ voices actively shape their educational experiences.



Why student voice matters

Districts are adopting new methods to evaluate teaching, with student surveys emerging as a powerful tool. Unlike traditional assessments that focus on external, retrospective measures, student voice provides real-time insights into classroom experiences, including emotional and relational aspects often overlooked. This data helps differentiate professional learning and tailor instructional practices across schools.

The Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project (2012) found that student survey results predict student achievement gains, proving that students recognize effective teaching when they experience it. As the Great Schools Partnership (2016) states, “Student perception surveys uncover hidden dynamics, address inequities, and foster supportive environments.”

Listening to students isn’t just about gathering feedback—it’s about action. By leveraging student voice, educators can create responsive, differentiated classrooms that improve both student outcomes and school culture.



Best Practices for Capturing Student Perspective: The 7Cs Survey

Education Elements provides the 7Cs Survey, a research-backed tool designed by Dr. Ronald Ferguson to evaluate and improve teaching practices through student feedback. This survey assesses seven key aspects of effective teaching, offering actionable insights for school improvement.

Component of Teacher Effectiveness	7Cs Construct	Description
Personal Support	Care	Show concern for student's emotional and academic well-being
	Confer	Encourage and value students' ideas and views
Curricular Support	Captivate	Spark and maintain student interest in learning
	Clarify	Help students understand content and resolve confusion
	Consolidate	Help students integrate and synthesize key ideas
Academic Press	Challenge	Insist that students persevere and do their best work
	Classroom Management	Foster orderly, respectful, and on-task classroom behavior

Why the 7Cs Survey Matters

The 7Cs Survey stands out because it:

- Measures key factors directly tied to student success
- Ensures accuracy and reliability in capturing student perspectives
- Supports school improvement, coaching, and professional learning
- framework captures both cognitive and emotional aspects of student-teacher interactions, making it a comprehensive measure of teaching quality.

Unlike traditional teacher evaluations that rely on observation, the 7Cs Survey provides a student-centered perspective for a more nuanced understanding of teaching practices. As noted in the Tripod K-12 Market Study (2024), the 7Cs framework blends academic rigor with the emotional aspects of learning, making it a comprehensive tool for analyzing teaching effectiveness (Adams, 2024)

Building on this research, Kuhfeld (2020) highlights that the 7Cs Survey is a reliable measure of teaching quality (p. 260). Originally developed for teacher evaluations, it is now widely used for school improvement, professional development, and instructional coaching.

By integrating the 7Cs Survey into educational practices, schools not only collect student voice but actively use it to shape teaching and learning strategies. As the MET Project emphasizes, the 7Cs framework effectively captures both cognitive and emotional aspects of student-teacher interactions, making it a powerful tool for student engagement and academic growth.

The 7Cs Survey is a valid and reliable student perception measurement

Educational research establishes the validity and reliability of the 7Cs framework. According to Kuhfeld (2020), “The 7Cs student survey (formerly known as the Tripod Survey) is a reliable tool for assessing teaching practices and capturing student perspectives” (Kuhfeld, 2020, p. 260). Further, longitudinal studies, like those highlighted in Phillips, Ferguson, & Rowley (2017), demonstrate that “changes in 7Cs scores correlate strongly with observational evaluations, reinforcing its credibility as a measurement tool” (Phillips, Ferguson, & Rowley, 2017, p. 8).

When examined, each construct in the framework is carefully designed to reflect critical teaching behaviors that influence student outcomes, making it both a practical and insightful measure. As noted in the MET Project when discussing the 7Cs Survey, “Student perception surveys provide actionable insights into teaching quality, enabling schools to identify strengths and areas for improvement effectively (Measures of Effective Teaching, 2012, p. 18).”

The 7Cs Survey Reflects Methodological Rigor

We use the 7Cs Survey in our practice with districts because the methodology behind it ensures high reliability and construct validity. The 7Cs Survey is designed with clear, concise questions that minimize bias and encourage honest feedback. Once data is collected, it undergoes rigorous statistical analysis to ensure consistency and accuracy in measuring teaching quality. Studies of longitudinal data from the 7Cs Survey demonstrate predictive validity, correlating with both classroom observations and student achievement outcomes.

As noted in the 7Cs K-12 Market Study (2024), “The 7Cs framework is rooted in both academic rigor and the emotional aspects of learning, making it a powerful tool to analyze teaching effectiveness.”

Leveraging 7Cs Student Survey Data to Guide Transformation

In our extensive work with school districts across the country, we use the 7Cs Survey to help guide discussions around instruction and teacher support. The data from students is extremely helpful in assessing where instruction can be improved because it enables district and school leaders to understand what is happening in classrooms. As noted by Rowley & Phillips (2017), “Attention to formal feedback from the 7Cs framework is linked to significant improvements in teacher practices” (p. 18).

Schools and districts use 7Cs Survey data to design targeted professional learning programs, helping teachers improve their practices in specific areas. The framework provides insights into disparities in student

experiences across demographics, enabling schools to address differences effectively. The 7Cs framework can also inform broader educational policies and contribute to the field of educational research by offering a scalable, data-driven approach to evaluating teaching quality.

The framework has been used in numerous schools and districts to foster a culture of continuous improvement. Throughout this paper, we will highlight work from Washington County Schools in Jonesborough, Tennessee and Harrisburg City School District in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Trove of Student Experience Data Highlights Informative Post-COVID Trends

The Pandemic's Impact on Education:

The 7Cs data shows that the lower school students experienced the most fluctuations post-Covid, while the middle and high school student data was more stable. The data below shows a picture of how the different constructs were measured from 2015-24 and how to see trends across student populations. Their data reveals a remarkable story of post-pandemic adaptation:

- COVID-19 disrupted engagement, differentiation, and learning outcomes.
- 72% of students reported low engagement during remote learning (Bawa, 2022).
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2022) found that the pandemic worsened educational disparities, leading to long-term learning loss.
- Social-emotional wellness was also deeply affected.

Opportunities in the Post-COVID Era:

- Increased focus on technology integration and personalized learning.
- AI-driven adaptive learning systems are reshaping education (Marr, 2024).
- Mental health support has become a priority in schools.
- A 2022 CDC report found that:
 - 37% of high school students reported poor mental health.
 - 44% felt persistently sad or hopeless due to social isolation, parental stress, and disrupted routines.

Aligning Innovation with Student Needs:

- The 7Cs framework helps ensure new strategies prioritize student experiences.
- By analyzing 7Cs Survey data alongside broader trends, schools can create inclusive, forward-thinking learning environments.
- Education Elements has used the 7Cs Survey across 100+ districts, providing research-based insights to help school leaders adapt teaching practices to today's evolving student needs.

Student Experience Across Demographics & Constructs

Our national 7Cs Survey data provides insights into student experiences pre-COVID (2016–2019) and post-COVID (2021–2024) from the student perspective. By elevating student voice, we highlight its role as a key driver for school improvement, student engagement, and well-being.

Schools that effectively use 7Cs student perception data see measurable gains in teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes. With millions of student observations, we offer data-driven guidance to help schools understand today’s student experience and use both national trends and their own data to create more effective learning environments.

Table 1 shows the average 7Cs Survey item score provided by students at each survey level for school years 2016-17 to 2018-19 and school years 2021-22 to 2023-24:*

Table 1

Average 7Cs Item Score						
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Upper Elementary	312	318	324	320	296	282
Middle School	310	336	312	310	298	286
High School	312	324	318	314	298	292

*Notes:
[1] Upper Elementary includes grades 3-5, Middle School grades 6-8, and High School grades 9-12.
[2] 7Cs items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale.
[3] Analyses were restricted to schools in the US.
[4] Analyses excluded responses with less than a 50% completion of the survey.

For both the pre-COVID and post-COVID periods, Upper Elementary students reported the highest scores, and Middle School students reported the lowest scores. While Upper Elementary scores show a decrease by as much as 0.09 points between pre- and post-COVID school years, Middle School and High School scores show an overall increase in the school years after COVID. This is consistent with many findings that show the effect of COVID-19 disproportionately affected younger students.

The research conducted by Curriculum Associates in its paper, “Student Growth in the Post-COVID Era,” released in July 2024, reveals that the youngest elementary school students are struggling to catch up to pre-pandemic levels in reading and math, unlike their older counterparts. This also aligns with the findings from Frontiers in Public Health’s paper, “Impact of COVID-19 on the Lives and Mental Health of Children and Adolescents” (2022), which found that younger children may face more intense long-term psychosocial effects due to the critical role of peer relationships during childhood and adolescence.

Key Takeaways & Why It Matters

- Younger students were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, both academically and socially.
- Instructional time is crucial in early grades, and its loss disrupted foundational knowledge-building (Pinto, 2023).
- Personalized learning should be a priority to close learning gaps and meet individual student needs.
- The post-COVID era is an opportunity to use student perception data and frameworks like the 7Cs to drive targeted support (Friedman, 2023).

The breakdown by 7Cs construct scores further highlights the variation in student experience among different grade groups. Table 2 shows the average item score by 7Cs constructs at each survey level:

Table 2

Average 7Cs Item Score By Construct							
		2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Care	UE	4.44	4.46	4.43	4.45	4.42	4.42
	MD	3.81	3.82	3.79	3.87	3.77	3.77
	HS	3.80	3.86	3.82	3.99	3.94	3.96
Confer	UE	3.88	3.98	3.88	3.99	3.92	3.93
	MD	3.86	3.90	3.87	4.04	3.89	3.90
	HS	3.89	3.95	3.90	4.19	4.12	4.12
Captivate	UE	4.05	4.09	4.00	4.00	3.91	3.94
	MD	3.49	3.50	3.50	3.55	3.47	3.49
	HS	3.45	3.48	3.48	3.59	3.56	3.58
Clarify	UE	4.40	4.44	4.37	4.37	4.33	4.32
	MD	3.92	3.94	3.91	3.98	3.87	3.88
	HS	3.89	3.94	3.91	4.08	4.01	4.04
Consolidate	UE	4.22	4.25	4.16	4.21	4.17	4.15
	MD	3.97	4.01	3.96	4.06	3.99	3.98
	HS	3.93	3.99	3.95	4.14	4.08	4.12
Challenge	UE	4.34	4.37	4.29	4.27	4.24	4.23
	MD	4.06	4.09	4.05	4.12	4.04	4.02
	HS	4.00	4.06	4.01	4.16	4.11	4.12
Classroom Management	UE	3.57	3.60	3.53	3.59	3.55	3.56
	MD	3.31	3.30	3.31	3.39	3.34	3.33
	HS	3.54	3.59	3.56	3.70	3.67	3.68

Upper Elementary students generally rated the 7Cs constructs more favorably than Middle and High School students both before and after COVID. However, their average 7Cs ranking declined post-pandemic. Specifically, Upper Elementary students scored the “Personal Support” construct of “Care” the highest, but pre-pandemic scores were higher, indicating that the pandemic and remote environments may have impacted relationship-building and personalized support. In contrast, High School students saw a significant increase in this category in the “Confer” construct, with a 29 percentage point rise post-COVID, indicating stronger teacher-student rapport due to innovative educational approaches.

Similarly, along the “Curricular Support” dimension, High School students scored the “Consolidate” construct significantly higher between SY 2018-19 to 2021-22, with nearly a 20 percentage point increase. Based on these scores, teachers at the high school level may have leveraged the use of technology, and other innovative instructional approaches that COVID allowed, to connect ideas and synthesize concepts for students. These findings point to varied effects of the pandemic on student-teacher relationships, with positive outcomes for high school students and slight challenges for younger students in curricular support and academic press. The results of the 7Cs Survey allow us to understand differences in student experiences by school level, and drive education improvements to address these disparities.

Figure 1

Average 7Cs Item Score by Construct

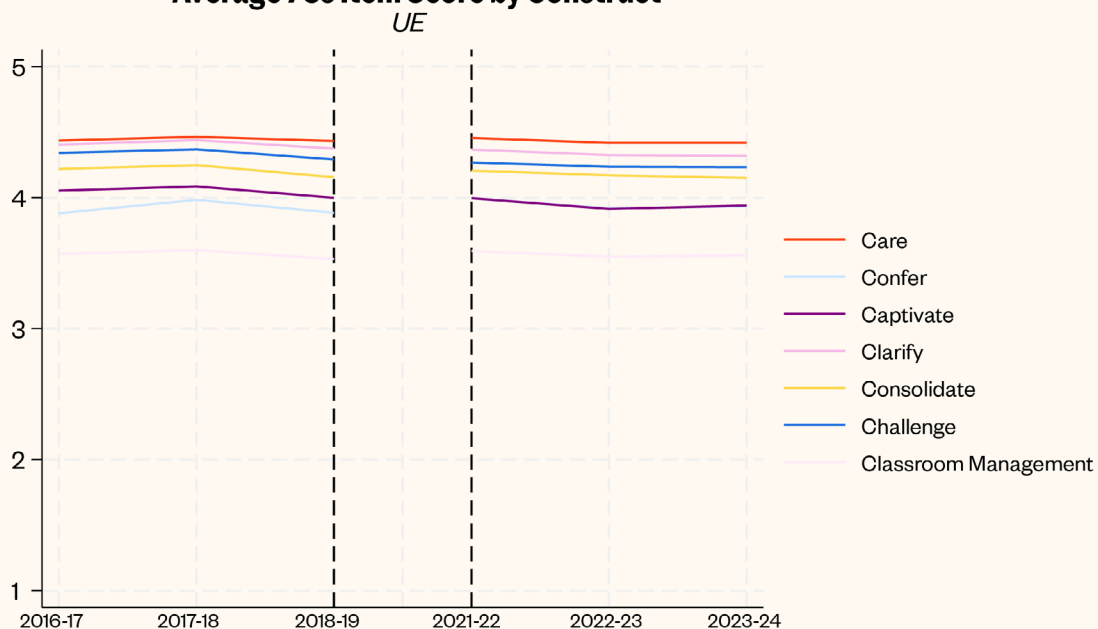


Figure 2
Average 7Cs Item Score by Construct

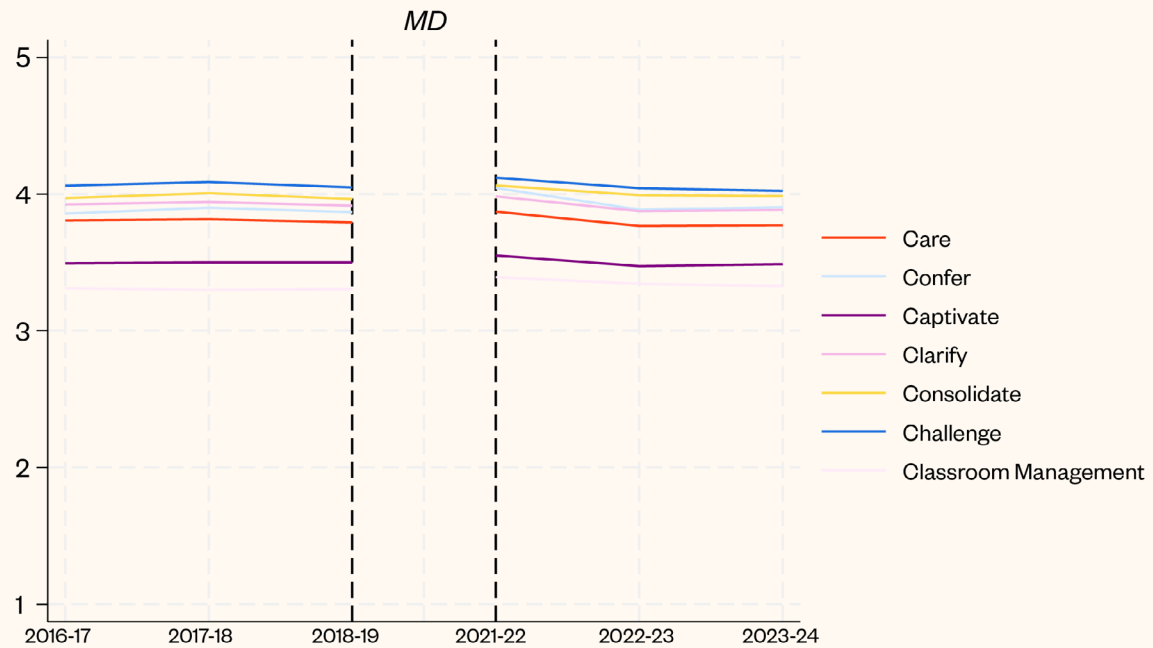
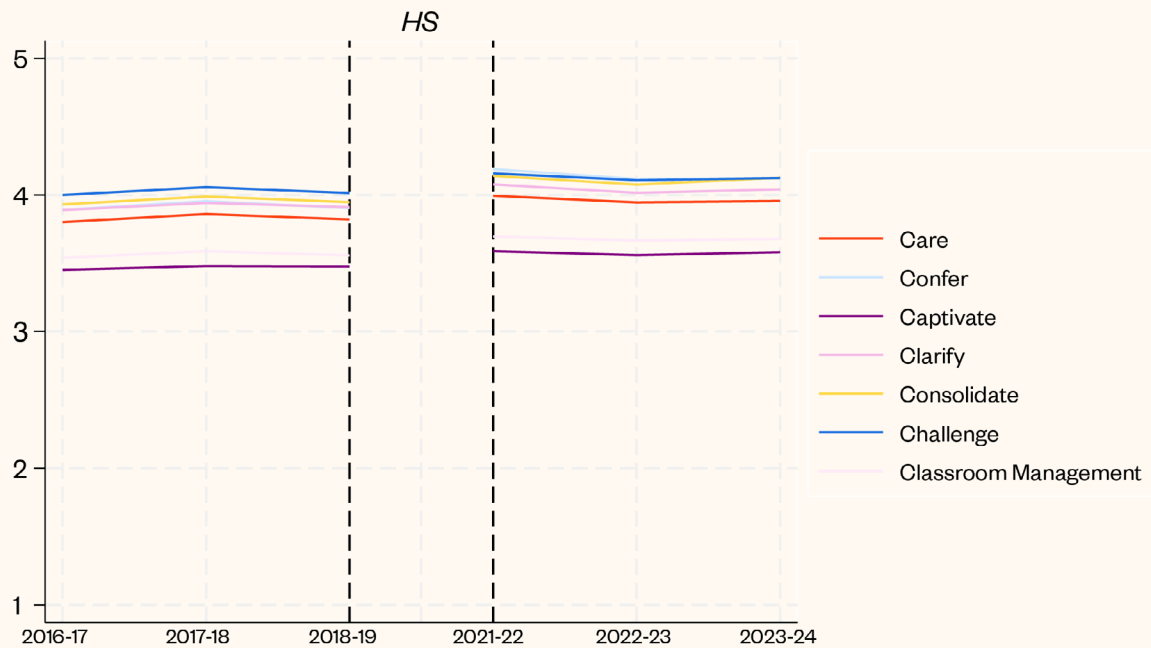


Figure 3
Average 7Cs Item Score by Construct

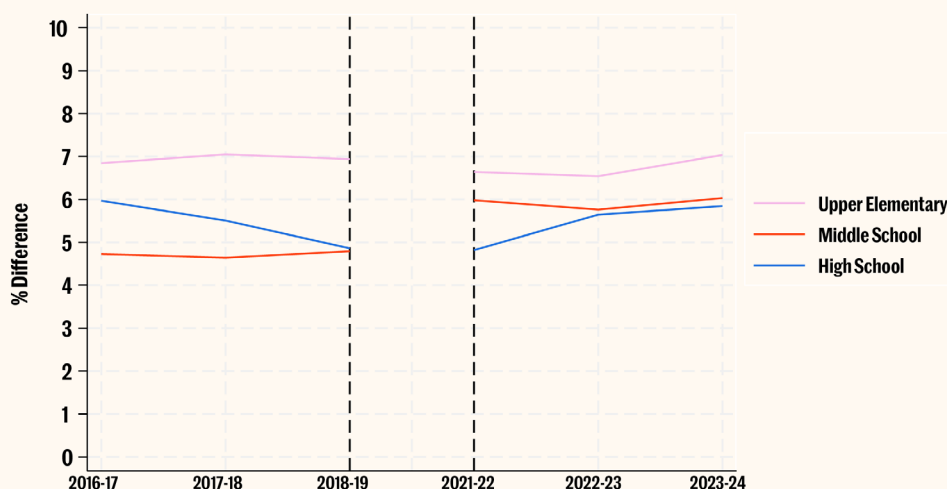


Among Upper Elementary students, Care was the strongest construct, with an average item score above 4.4 both pre- and post-COVID, which is 13% higher than the average Care scores of Middle School and High School students. In contrast, Challenge was the strongest construct overall for both Middle School and High School students both pre- and post-COVID. This finding is consistent with research from the Annenberg Center at Brown University. In the 2022 study, “Test Score Patterns Across Three COVID-19-impacted School Years,” we can see the differentiated impacts and needs of students across different grades.

These research-based findings are in line with what we observe during classroom observations across the country—there is far more emphasis on the emotional needs of elementary students than their middle school peers as students progress through their K-12 years. The academic demand and expectation increases with each school year, so it is not surprising to see these results. However, there is a plethora of research that demonstrates the need for more emphasis on the social emotional supports for middle school and high school students given the complexity of this stage of human development. As Ellen Galinsky notes in her research, children need to feel like they matter, regardless of their age (Galinsky, 2010).

Figure 4 reports the percent difference in scores between students who self-reported themselves as high-performing versus students who self-reported themselves as low-performing. At each survey level, we observe a positive percent difference, indicating that, on average, high-performing students score their teachers more favorably than low-performing students. This finding is evident in both pre- and post-COVID; however, we observe an increase in the percent difference post-COVID for Middle School, which we do not observe at the Upper Elementary and High School levels.

Figure 4
Percent Difference in 7Cs Scores
between High and Low Performing Students



Notes:
 [1] For Upper Elementary, high-performing students reflect students who reported their past grades were usually Very high or High, and Low Performing students reflect students who reported their past grades consisted of Some good, some not or Not very good.
 [2] For Middle School and High School, High Performing students reflect students who reported their GPA last term for all of their classes as A or A-, and Low Performing students reflect students who reported their GPA last term for all of their classes as a C+ or lower.

Demographic Highlights of Student Perspectives

Gender

Both pre- and post-COVID trends show no significant differences in overall average 7Cs scores between students who identify as male versus students who identify as female (see Figures 5-7). In the pre-COVID period, Upper Elementary students who identified as female scored, on average, 0.08 points higher than Upper Elementary students who identified as male; however, this slight difference only decreases in the post-COVID period.



Figure 5

Average 7Cs Item Score from Male and Female Students
UE Only

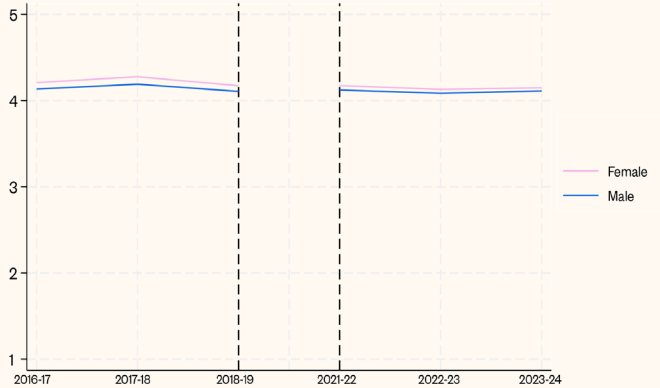


Figure 6

Average 7Cs Item Score from Male and Female Students
MD Only

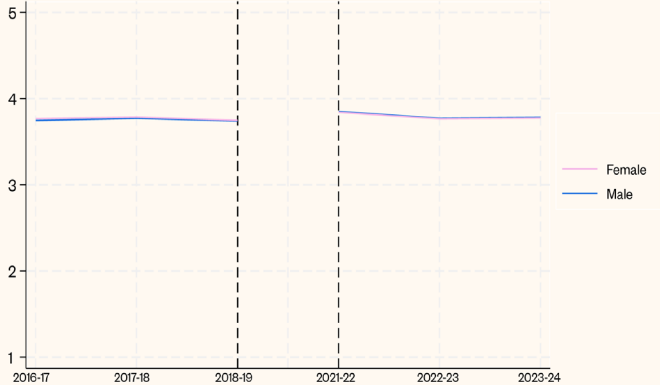


Figure 7

Average 7Cs Item Score from Male and Female Students
HS Only

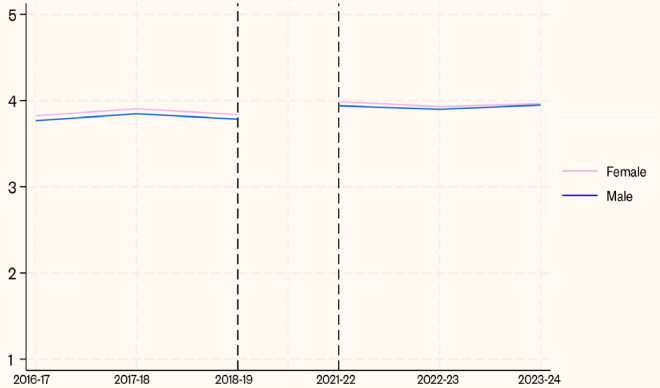


Figure 8

**Pre vs. Post-COVID Percent Change in Average
7Cs Item Score by Construct**

UE



Figure 9

**Pre vs. Post-COVID Percent Change in Average
7Cs Item Score by Construct**

MD

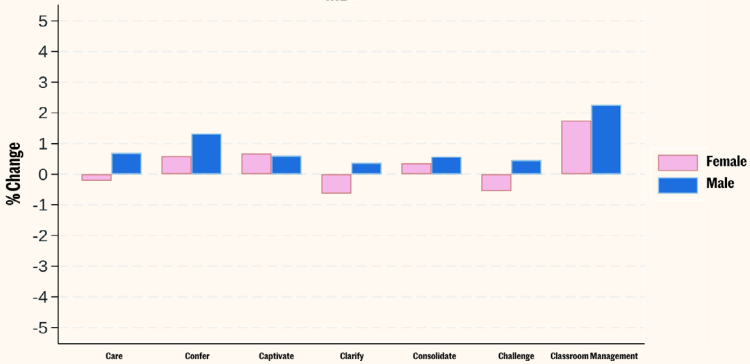
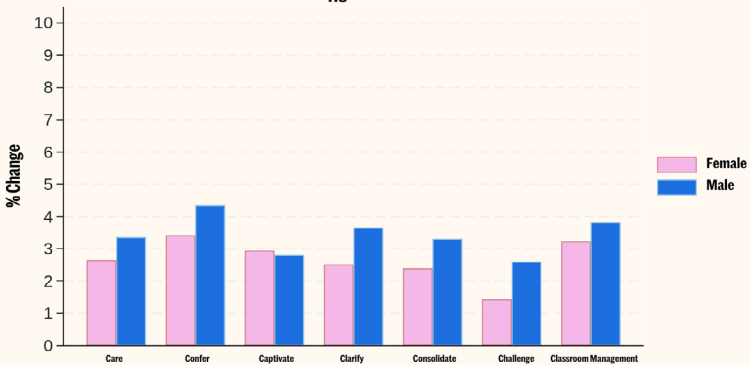


Figure 10

**Pre vs. Post-COVID Percent Change in Average
7Cs Item Score by Construct**

HS

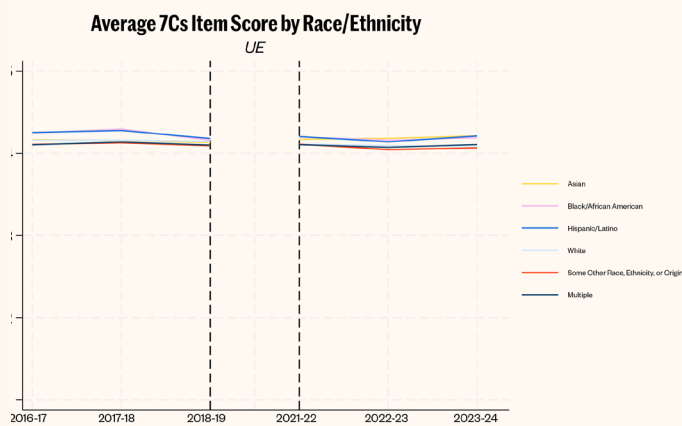
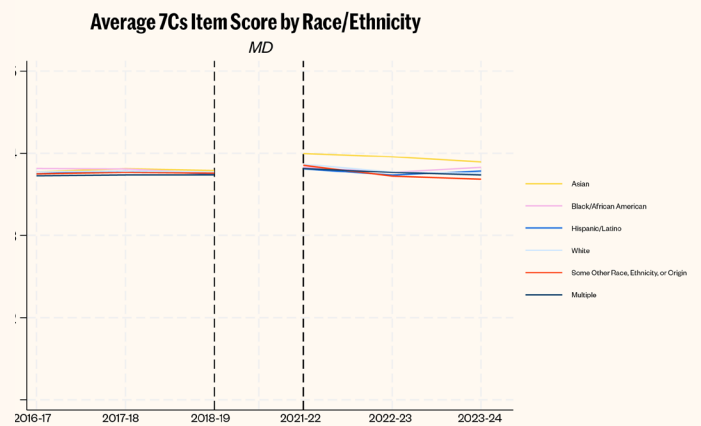
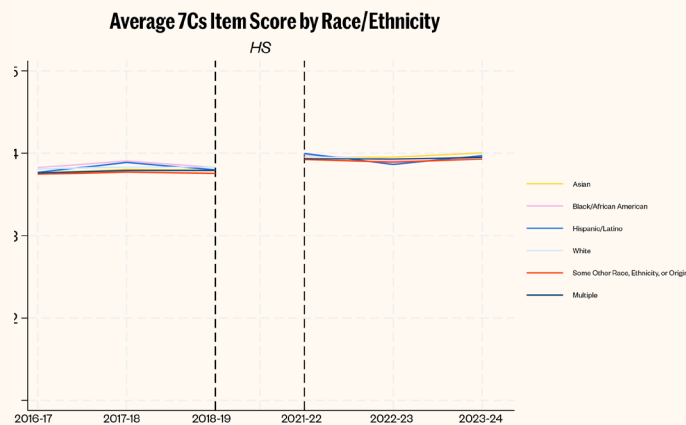


When we further disaggregate the data at the construct level, we see that across all survey levels, female students, on average, had a smaller percent change in scores from pre-COVID (school years 2016-2018) to post-COVID (school years 2021-2024) compared to male students (see Figures 8-10). For Middle School and High School, Challenge and Clarify show the greatest discrepancies in the percent change in construct scores from male students versus female students. For Upper Elementary, Confer shows the greatest gap in percent change between male and female students.

Race & Ethnicity

Figures 11-13 analyze differences in average 7Cs item scores from students across race and ethnicity. For Upper Elementary, we observe slightly higher scores during the pre-COVID school years from students who identified as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino. Post-COVID, we observe a slight increase in those scores for Upper Elementary students who identified as Asian, moving closer to the scores for Black/African American, or Hispanic/Latino. For Middle School, students who identify as Asian reported slightly higher average 7Cs item scores in the post-COVID school years compared to students who identified with other races and ethnicities. Specifically, the average 7Cs item scores from Asian-identifying students range from 0.14 to 0.20 points above non-Asian-identifying students from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

These findings contrast with broader academic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, according to several studies, further exacerbated differences in educational outcomes based on race and ethnicity (Baum, 2024). While the pandemic is often associated with declines in academic performance, especially among underrepresented groups, the results from the 7Cs Survey suggest a more nuanced picture. The survey highlights that students identifying as Asian, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino reported improvements in classroom environment, content delivery, and overall student engagement. This could be attributed to changes in classroom and instructional practices following the pandemic, such as the adoption of remote and hybrid learning models, which may have provided more personalized or flexible learning experiences for these groups. This indicates that the 7Cs Survey offers districts an opportunity to gain a more holistic understanding of students’ experiences in the classroom, extending beyond academic scores and allowing for a deeper exploration of the factors influencing engagement and learning.

Figure 11**Figure 12****Figure 13****Notes:**

[1] Multiple accounts for students who selected more than one race/ethnicity.

[2] Only responses where students provided their race/ethnicity were included in Figures 5-7.

Data Limitation Mentions:

As we review this data, we should note that the 7Cs scores are reflective of the student experience in a particular class, and not their experience at school overall. Various factors might cause a student to score differently across classes (e.g., teacher, classmates). Future research on score trends concerning class subject, class period, and overall teacher scores could address some of the aforementioned gaps.

Another data limitation, specifically concerning Figure 4, is the reliance on self-reported student performance data to identify and compare high-performing students and low-performing students. Future research could incorporate student performance data directly from the school to remove potential biases such as recall bias and social desirability bias.

Real-World Validation of the 7Cs Survey: Harrisburg School District's Journey

In August 2023, Harrisburg School District partnered with Education Elements to transform its approach to personalized learning. Their first 7Cs Survey administration in 2023 became a catalyst for systemic change. Educators in the district personalize learning by targeting instruction, fostering collaboration and creativity, facilitating reflection and goal-setting, and designing flexible learning experiences. Personalizing learning is an active and ongoing process—a student-centered approach to learning that calls on educators to be responsive to the needs of their students. This research-backed model which fosters small group and 1:1 interactions allows teachers more opportunities to observe students' learning and provide higher quality, targeted feedback—which has a proven impact on students' cognitive development and learning (Wisniewski, Zierer, and Hattie, 2019).

Harrisburg leveraged learning walks to build a strong understanding of each teacher's entry points to implement and advance personalized learning. After administering the 7Cs Survey, each school reviewed its results and personalized learning walkthrough data to identify areas of opportunity, create an action plan, and monitor progress. The 7Cs Survey was

administered again in the Spring of 2024 to measure progress on the goals they had set after the first survey administration. This data served as a source to help set goals for the next school year and create an action plan.

Rowland Middle School, for instance, identified areas of growth in Classroom Management and Captivate constructs, leading to targeted professional learning and measurable improvements. Each teacher created an implementation plan aligned with the identified areas of growth. By the second administration of the 7Cs Survey, Rowland improved their Captivate score by 16 points. This data empowered school leadership to create a shared vision and plan to develop staff competencies. In Fall 2024, the 7Cs Survey was again administered to measure progress and the results showed an incredible 12 point increase in Care, 4 points in Challenge, and 8 points in Classroom Management. Overall, Rowland leveraged student voice through the 7Cs Survey to identify areas of growth and drive change rooted in data to make improvements in their learning environment for students.

Using Student Perception to Advance Instructional Practices in Washington County Schools, TN

Washington County Schools (WCS), located in Jonesborough, Tennessee, serves over 9,000 students across 15 schools, encompassing grades Pre-K through 12. The district is dedicated to fostering academic excellence and student growth by continuously refining instructional practices and engaging in data-driven decision-making. With a strong emphasis on student engagement and professional development, WCS is committed to providing an enriching learning environment for all students.

Implementing the 7Cs Framework

WCS sought a tool that could provide deeper insights into the student experience and offer actionable feedback to improve instruction. The district chose the 7Cs framework and survey for its research-backed approach to measuring the most critical elements of effective teaching:



The 7Cs framework and survey provide comprehensive feedback on key instructional elements. This feedback is actionable and research-backed, linking to higher student achievement and engagement. The framework’s holistic approach covers personal support, curricular support, and academic press, ensuring a well-rounded teaching method.



– Stephanie Gouge, Academic Specialist

The 7Cs Survey aligns with WCS’s vision for professional development, offering teachers a valuable opportunity to reflect on their instructional approaches and make meaningful improvements based on student perceptions.

Key Insights from 7Cs Data

Administering the 7Cs Survey across WCS revealed strengths in teacher-student relationships and a positive classroom environment where students felt supported. “Throughout the district, our students genuinely feel cared about. This is evident in strong teacher-student relationships, with teachers effectively fostering a supportive, respectful, and inclusive classroom environment. Our teachers also excel in facilitating open dialogue and actively involving students in discussions.” – Stephanie Gouge, Academic Specialist

The data also highlighted areas for growth, particularly in ensuring that all student voices were heard. As Dr. Joshua Davis, Deputy Chief Academic Officer, reflected, “After reviewing the initial survey data, we realized that widening our scope was important because we were not hearing from all students, particularly in our high schools. This helped us craft our work to be more relevant for all students.”

Turning Insights Into Action

Dr. Davis shared, “Data was analyzed after each survey and used to plan and implement next steps. The work was adjusted based upon survey results for both teachers and classroom instruction. We also used the data to ensure that our efforts were having the desired impact—or if we needed to adjust to reach more students in a positive way.”

The district also used the survey findings to identify needs beyond instruction, informing partnerships and support systems for specific student groups. One key finding was that ninth-grade students felt less connected to school, prompting WCS to explore targeted interventions for freshman engagement and transition support.

Early Impact and Observable Changes

While still in the early stages of their Personalized Learning (PL) work, WCS has already noted a clear difference in student engagement between classrooms where teachers have implemented small instructional shifts and those that have not. Specifically, “student engagement and principles of active learning are more prevalent in classrooms where teachers have incorporated small 1% shifts in their practices”, shared Dr. Davis.

Additionally, the insights from the 7Cs framework have influenced the district’s Science Textbook Adoption Process. Teachers who participated in this work examined the instructional materials being reviewed for opportunities to incorporate the PL framework, ensuring that instructional materials align with evidence-based best practices that best support student learning.

Recommendations for School Leaders

The evidence is clear: Schools that systematically gather and act upon student perception data create more effective learning environments and achieve better outcomes. Any district leader who is prioritizing student belonging and/or voice must establish a framework for assessing and improving the learning experience. Based on our research and extensive work with districts nationwide, we recommend the following actions for school leaders:

1. **Prioritize** Student Voice in Decision-Making

- Implement regular, systematic collection of student perception data through effective, validated tools, such as the 7Cs Survey.
- Create formal processes for incorporating student feedback into professional learning planning.
- Establish clear protocols for using student perception data alongside other metrics in teacher development to gain a holistic understanding of the student experience.
- Ensure student perception data is purposefully collected to drive meaningful improvements that respond to students' needs and realities.

2. **Build** a Data-Driven Culture of Continuous Improvement

- Train administrators and instructional leaders in effectively analyzing and acting upon student perception data to make data-driven decisions.
- Create regular cycles of data collection, analysis, and action planning based on student feedback.
- Develop systems for tracking improvements and measuring impact over time.
- Foster a data-driven culture that creates space for vulnerability and openness.

3. **Invest** in Professional Learning That Responds to Student Needs

- Personalize professional learning opportunities based on insights gained from student perception data, offering targeted support.
- Provide targeted support in areas where student feedback indicates improvement is needed. This means differentiating by school and classroom!
- Create opportunities for teachers to collaborate around student feedback data in professional learning communities, building a shared understanding and collective improvement.

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Authors & Contributors

Sucheta Bangalore

Sucheta Bangalore is a Solutions Research & Development Analyst with a background in Special Education. She strives to analyze and synthesize complex data into actionable solutions. Sucheta has a Masters degree in Special Education and believes in data-driven decisions to improve learning. She is known for her ability to make complex concepts more accessible for diverse audiences.

Lena Munzer

Lena Munzer is a Research Scientist on the Solutions Research and Development team where she leads the data integrity, score validation efforts, and survey development. Lena received her B.A. in Economics from Yale University. Upon graduation, she worked as an economic consultant for the Antitrust and Competition practice at Charles River Associates. For five years, she managed and analyzed data relied on in high-stakes litigation cases across a breadth of industries.

Dr. Leila Nuland

Leila is Senior Vice-President & General Manager, Professional Educational Services at Education Elements and is passionate about bridging the gap between rigorous research, policy, and practice. She has experience managing large groups of researchers, professional service providers, and instructional design specialists who deliver and execute a range of methodologies, advisory services, and provide online professional development for instructional leaders and staff. Over the course of her career, she has leveraged her experience as a high school teacher to build out high-impact products and services that support K-12 educators and leaders. She is passionate about inclusive leadership and has a track record for developing strategy for and managing teams in a high-growth environment.

Seth Swanson

Seth Swanson is a Solutions Research & Development Analyst who leverages his science teaching background and robust technical data skills to transform complex data into actionable insights. Seth has a Masters Degree in Data Analytics, is an experienced educator and detail-oriented Data Analyst with a robust background in SQL, databases, and exploratory analysis. He is known for his ability to translate complex concepts into accessible language for diverse constituents, and immediate practical application.

Julia Temple

Julia Temple is a Survey & Data Implementation Specialist at Education Elements. Julia believes in the transformative power of education and is committed to using advanced research, data analytics, and policy to improve the lives and learning experiences of students. She received her bachelor's degree in Policy Analysis and Management with a minor in Education from Cornell University. Julia started her career as a K-12 Education Research Associate, supporting school districts and government agencies using secondary research and survey data to optimize school resources and drive impact within public schools.

Justo Yanez

Justo Yanez is a Research Consultant with over a decade of experience in education, spanning roles in teaching, school leadership, and research. He has led multidisciplinary teams, spearheaded data-driven initiatives, and supported K-12 schools and districts in achieving strategic goals. Previously, he served as a Founding Assistant Principal at IDEA Public Schools and as Director for Equity and Partnerships at Upstream Education, where he led efforts to enhance curriculum, foster educational equity, and improve student outcomes. In Fall 2025, Justo will begin doctoral studies in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of South Florida's College of Education, focusing on literary studies and social and ecological justice.