

Student Background Surveys

Teachers should try to learn a little bit about each student at the beginning of the year to understand the backgrounds students are coming from and to obtain information on which to build relationships with students. One common way of obtaining such information is the student background survey—a questionnaire given at the start of the school year or beginning of a course containing questions relevant to students' lives. The survey could include questions about students' academic interests (favorite and least favorite subject in school), personal interests (hobbies, sports, lessons, art, books, video games, movies, and television shows), dreams, fears, family members, and family activities (traditions, vacations, and gatherings). Teachers can also provide sentence stems for students, such as, "During my free time I like to _____" or "Someday I'd like to be _____." Teachers can then use the information on the background surveys to inform interactions with students throughout the year.

Teacher Actions

- Creating survey questions that elicit information about students' backgrounds, interests, and goals
- Encouraging students to answer survey questions thoroughly and completely
- Evaluating survey responses to identify students' backgrounds, interests, and goals

Desired Student Responses

- Responding to survey questions honestly and in detail
- Describing the teacher as someone who is interested in them

Extra Support

- Allowing students to record (audio or video) their responses to background survey questions if they aren't comfortable writing them

Extension

- Asking students to create artwork, musical compositions, written pieces, films, or other media to express their backgrounds, interests, and goals

Technology Tips

- Use polling software to conduct a student background survey, and use the results to divide students into small groups based on common interests or backgrounds.
- Create a student background survey using an online survey tool. Have students analyze the class's responses to better understand one another's unique backgrounds and interests.
- Ask students to take and edit a photo of themselves and incorporate those photos into their student background surveys. Use these photos to help memorize students' names.

Example Questions for Student Background Surveys

- Where were you born?
- How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- What are some things about your family that make you proud?
- What kinds of things did you do over the summer or on vacation that you enjoyed?
- What would you do if you knew you wouldn't fail?
- Do you have any hobbies (collecting things, artistic endeavors, building things)? If so, what are they?
- Do you participate in sports? If so, which sport(s)? What do you like best about playing that sport?
- Do you take lessons of any kind (music, art, singing, dance, speech)? If so, what kind?
- What is your favorite book, game, movie, video or computer game, or television show?
- If you had to describe yourself in a sentence or two, what might you say that would help others learn something about your personal interests?
- During my free time I like to _____.
- One thing I really like to do with my friends is _____.
- I really enjoy _____.
- My family enjoys _____.
- If I had a month of Saturdays, I'd spend most of my time _____.
- Someday I'd like to be _____.