The VOICE™ Survey

Voice **O**f the **I**ndividual **C**onsumer in **E**ducation

My Learning Session Feedback

For GIEP/IEP/ISP Service Evaluation

Technical Manual and Scoring Guide

Version 1.4 | January 2026

Data.Driven.Advocacy

Table of Contents

Acronym Definitions

Acronym	Full Term
VOICE	**V**oice **O**f the **I**ndividual **C**onsumer in **E**ducation
GIEP	Gifted Individualized Education Program
IEP	Individualized Education Program
ISP	Individualized Service Plan
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
BASC-3	Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition
ENG	Engagement Subscale
CHL	Challenge Level Subscale
USE	Usefulness Subscale
REL	Relationship Subscale
VOI	Voice and Choices Subscale
EXP	Experience Subscale

I. Purpose and Rationale

The VOICE Model: Student as Consumer

VOICE = **V**oice **O**f the **I**ndividual **C**onsumer in **E**ducation

The VOICE Survey is built on a simple principle: the student is the primary consumer of GIEP/IEP/ISP services. Whether a student receives a Gifted Individualized Education Program (GIEP), an Individualized Education Program (IEP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), or an Individualized Service Plan (ISP), their experience of services is a critical, yet often unmeasured, indicator of service quality and effectiveness.

Just as businesses survey consumers to improve products, educators should survey students to improve services. The VOICE model positions students as experts on their own learning experience.

Applicability Across Service Types

Service Type	Description	VOICE Applicability
GIEP	Gifted Individualized Education Program for students identified as gifted	Challenge calibration, engagement, boredom detection
IEP	Individualized Education Program under IDEA for students with disabilities	All subscales; service quality, relationship, voice
ISP	Individualized Service Plan (used in early intervention or private settings)	Adapted for younger students with read-aloud administration

Destigmatized Language Design

Version 1.4 Update: Following research on special education stigma, this survey uses neutral, empowering language that avoids deficit-focused terminology.

Original Term	Revised Term	Rationale
"Special help time"	"Learning session"	Avoids "special" euphemism; all students have learning sessions
"Special help"	"My session"	Neutral, non-categorical
"Getting extra help"	"The work I do"	Focuses on achievement, not remediation
"Leaving class for special help"	"Going to my session"	Removes stigmatizing framing
"My special help makes school easier"	"My session helps me do better"	Achievement-focused, not deficit-focused

Research Basis for Language Choices

- **Person-First Language (Niche.com, 2023):** "Student with special needs" not "special needs student": the child is a student first.
- **Stigma Formation (Right Question Institute, 2021):** "Often by middle school students are keenly aware of being different... This is the age that stigma begins to form."
- **BASC-3/Conners Design:** Validated instruments use neutral behavioral language (e.g., "your teacher") rather than categorical labels.
- **Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan):** Autonomy-supportive language promotes intrinsic motivation; deficit-focused language undermines it.

Administration Recommendation: Personalize

Best Practice: Replace "Teacher/Session" with the actual teacher/provider name:

- *"Think about your time with Mx. Smith"*
- *"Think about your Thursday morning group"*

This matches how students naturally think about services and completely removes categorical framing.

II. Survey Structure

Title and Framing

Element	Text	Design Rationale
Title	"My Learning Session Feedback"	Student-centered ("My"); focuses on learning, not remediation
Subtitle	"Your Voice Matters: Help Us Make Learning Work Better for You"	Empowering; positions student as expert on their experience
Instructions	"Think about your learning session"	Neutral; can be personalized with teacher name

Subscales and Items

Subscale	Code	Items	Construct Measured
A. Engagement	ENG	1-4	Affective engagement; interest vs. boredom
B. Challenge Level	CHL	5-8	Perceived difficulty; too easy/hard/just right
C. Usefulness	USE	9-11	Perceived relevance; generalization
D. My Teacher	REL	12-15	Therapeutic alliance; feeling understood
E. My Voice and Choices	VOI	16-18	Autonomy; self-determination
F. My Experience	EXP	19-22	Service experience; scheduling impact

Total Items: 22 Likert-scale + 1 open-ended

Response Scale (Conners/BASC Design)

Response	Score	Rationale
Never	0	Clear absence
Sometimes	1	Inconsistent presence
Often	2	Consistent presence
Always	3	Full presence

Why 4 points (no midpoint)?

- Avoids satisficing (selecting neutral to avoid thinking)
- Forces directional response
- Simpler cognitive processing for children
- Consistent with Conners-3, BASC-3 response formats

III. Reverse-Coded Items

Items Marked (R)

Item	Text	Source and Rationale
2	"I feel bored during my session."	Case-derived: Parent report of "too easy and boring." Research: Student Engagement Instrument (Appleton et al., 2006)
5	"The work is too easy for me."	Case-derived: IEP goals 1-2 grades below level. Research: Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)
7	"I already know what my teacher is teaching."	Case-derived: Below-grade-level goals suggest instructional redundancy. Research: Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky)
22	"I miss things in class that I wish I did not."	IDEA principle: LRE requires consideration of "harmful effects" of removal (34 CFR §300.116).

Reverse scoring formula: Score = 3 - Response

IV. Scoring Procedures

Step 1: Reverse Score Items 2, 5, 7, 22

Original Response	Reversed Score
Never (0)	3
Sometimes (1)	2
Often (2)	1
Always (3)	0

Step 2: Calculate Subscale Scores

Subscale	Items	Max Score
ENG (Engagement)	1, 2(R), 3, 4	12
CHL (Challenge)	5(R), 6, 7(R), 8	12
USE (Usefulness)	9, 10, 11	9
REL (Relationship)	12, 13, 14, 15	12
VOI (Voice)	16, 17, 18	9
EXP (Experience)	19, 20, 21, 22(R)	12

Step 3: Calculate Total Score

Total Score = ENG + CHL + USE + REL + VOI + EXP = **0-66 points**

V. Interpretation Guidelines

Subscale Interpretation

Percentage	Classification	Action
0-25%	Very Low	Immediate service review
26-50%	Low	Discuss with student; modifications needed
51-75%	Adequate	Monitor; explore improvements
76-100%	High	Service meeting student needs

Item-Level Red Flags

Immediate attention warranted if:

Item	Response	Concern
2 (Bored)	Often/Always	Engagement failure
5 (Too easy)	Often/Always	Instructional mismatch
12 (Understood)	Never/Sometimes	Relationship rupture
18 (Goals)	Never	Self-determination deficit
20 (Okay going)	Never	Service causing distress
22 (Miss class)	Often/Always	Scheduling problem

VI. Worked Example: Case Study

This section demonstrates VOICE Survey administration, scoring, and interpretation through a realistic case study.

Case Description

Student: Jordan, Grade 10

Service: Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI) pullout session with Mx. Smith, 45 minutes, 3x weekly

Context: Jordan has mixed feelings about being pulled from general education classes for SAI. The SAI classroom environment is noisy with constant distractions from other students. Jordan reports that Mx. Smith, while supportive, does not offer subject matter expertise in the areas where Jordan needs academic support (currently struggling with Algebra 2 concepts). Jordan feels the pullout causes them to miss important content in their general education classes.

Completed Survey Responses

Survey personalized as: "Think about your time with Mx. Smith"

#	Item	Response	Raw	Score
A. Engagement [ENG]				
1	My learning session is interesting.	Sometimes	1	1
2	I feel bored during my session. (R) ⚠	**Often**	2	**1**
3	I look forward to my session.	Never	0	0
4	Time goes by fast during my session.	Sometimes	1	1
B. Challenge Level [CHL]				
5	The work is too easy for me. (R) ⚠	**Often**	2	**1**
6	The work makes me think and try hard.	Sometimes	1	1
7	I already know what my teacher is teaching. (R)	Often	2	1
8	I learn new things during my session.	Sometimes	1	1
C. Usefulness [USE]				
9	What I learn helps me in my other classes.	Sometimes	1	1
10	I use what I learn outside of school too.	Sometimes	1	1
11	My session helps me do better in school.	Sometimes	1	1
D. My Teacher [REL]				
12	My teacher understands how I learn best.	Sometimes	1	1
13	I feel okay asking questions.	Often	2	2
14	My teacher listens to my ideas.	Often	2	2
15	My teacher explains things so I understand.	Sometimes	1	1
E. My Voice and Choices [VOI]				
16	I get to make some choices in my session.	Sometimes	1	1
17	I can say when something is too hard or easy.	Often	2	2
18	I understand what my learning goals are.	Sometimes	1	1
F. My Experience [EXP]				
19	I have enough time to finish my work.	Sometimes	1	1
20	I feel okay about going to my session. ⚠	**Never**	0	**0**
21	I feel good about the work I do.	Sometimes	1	1
22	I miss things in class that I wish I did not. (R) ⚠	**Always**	3	**0**

Open-Ended Response (Item 23): "It's too loud and other kids are always talking. I can't concentrate. Also I need help with actual math but Mx. Smith doesn't really know Algebra 2 stuff."

Scoring Summary

Subscale	Raw Score	Max	Percentage	Classification
A. Engagement (ENG)	3	12	**25%**	**Very Low**
B. Challenge Level (CHL)	4	12	**33%**	**Low**
C. Usefulness (USE)	3	9	**33%**	**Low**
D. My Teacher (REL)	6	12	50%	Low
E. My Voice and Choices (VOI)	4	9	44%	Low
F. My Experience (EXP)	2	12	**17%**	**Very Low**
TOTAL SCORE	**22**	**66**	**33%**	**Low**

Red Flags Identified

The following items warrant immediate attention:

Item	Text	Response	Concern
2	I feel bored during my session.	**Often**	Engagement failure; work not stimulating
5	The work is too easy for me.	**Often**	Instructional mismatch; below ZPD
20	I feel okay about going to my session.	**Never**	Service causing significant distress
22	I miss things in class that I wish I did not.	**Always**	Scheduling problem; LRE harm concern

Interpretation

Overall Pattern: Jordan's total score of 22/66 (33%) falls in the **Low** range, indicating that the current SAI service delivery is not meeting Jordan's needs. However, the subscale pattern reveals important nuances:

- **Experience (EXP) at 17% (Very Low)** is the lowest subscale. The "Never" response to Item 20 (feeling okay going) combined with "Always" on Item 22 (missing class content) signals that the pullout model itself is causing harm. This aligns with IDEA's Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) requirement to consider "harmful effects" of removal from general education (34 CFR §300.116).
- **Engagement (ENG) at 25% (Very Low)** reflects the noisy, distracting environment described by Jordan. Boredom (Item 2) and not looking forward to sessions (Item 3 = Never) indicate affective disengagement.
- **Challenge Level (CHL) at 33% (Low)** confirms Jordan's report that Mx. Smith lacks subject matter expertise. Items 5 (work too easy) and 7 (already know material) scored high (raw), indicating instruction is below Jordan's Zone of Proximal Development for Algebra 2.
- **Relationship (REL) at 50% (Low)** is notably the *highest* subscale. Jordan feels comfortable asking questions (Item 13 = Often) and feels heard (Item 14 = Often). This suggests the issue is **not** the teacher-student relationship but rather the **service delivery model** and **instructional match**.

Recommended Next Steps

Based on the VOICE Survey results, the following actions should be considered at Jordan's next IEP meeting:

1. **Address the Environment (Immediate):** The noisy, distracting SAI classroom is a barrier to learning. Options include: (a) relocating Jordan's session to a quieter space, (b) providing noise-canceling headphones as an accommodation, or (c) restructuring the SAI class composition to reduce distractions.

2. **Reconsider Service Provider Match (High Priority):** Jordan needs Algebra 2 support from someone with secondary math expertise. The IEP team should consider: (a) assigning a math specialist or tutor with high school math credentials, (b) collaboration between Mx. Smith and the Algebra 2 teacher, or (c) push-in support within the general education math class instead of pullout.

3. **Re-evaluate Pullout Schedule (High Priority):** Jordan's "Always" response to missing class content (Item 22) is a significant LRE concern. The team should: (a) review what Jordan is missing during pullout, (b) consider alternative scheduling that doesn't conflict with core instruction, (c) explore push-in or after-school options, or (d) reduce pullout frequency if supplementary aids and services can support Jordan in general education.
4. **Increase Student Voice (Moderate Priority):** The VOI subscale at 44% suggests Jordan has *some* voice but not enough. Include Jordan in the IEP meeting discussion. Share these VOICE results with the team. Ask Jordan directly: "What would make this work better for you?"
5. **Follow-Up Assessment (Required):** Re-administer the VOICE Survey in 6-8 weeks after implementing changes to measure whether modifications improved Jordan's service experience. Target: all subscales at 51% or higher (Adequate range).

Key Takeaway

This case illustrates how the VOICE Survey can differentiate between **relationship problems** (REL subscale) and **service delivery problems** (EXP, CHL subscales). Jordan doesn't dislike Mx. Smith; Jordan dislikes the environment, the instructional mismatch, and missing class. Without the VOICE Survey, the team might have concluded that "the student just doesn't like special ed" and missed the *actionable* insights about environment, expertise, and scheduling.

VII. Administration Guidelines

Recommended Personalization

Before administering, customize the language:

Generic	Personalized Example
"Your learning session"	"Your time with Mx. Smith"
"My session"	"Your Thursday writing group"
"My teacher"	"Mx. Smith" or first name

This personalization removes all categorical language, matches student's natural way of thinking, and eliminates stigma completely.

Who Can Administer

- Parent (integrates service provider feedback with home observations)
- Teacher (classroom teacher, educational specialist, service provider)
- Therapist (SLP, OT, school psychologist, counselor)
- Neutral adult (reduces social desirability bias)

Accommodations

- **Read aloud:** All items may be read to student
- **Response assistance:** Adult circles per student's verbal response
- **Time:** No limit; typically 5-10 minutes
- **Breaks:** Allow as needed

Frequency

- **Recommended:** Once per trimester/quarter
- **Minimum:** Once per year (at annual IEP review)
- **After changes:** Following service modifications

VIII. Theoretical Framework

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

Need	Survey Subscale	Items
Autonomy	Voice and Choices (VOI)	16, 17, 18
Competence	Challenge Level (CHL)	5, 6, 7, 8
Relatedness	My Teacher (REL)	12, 13, 14, 15

Student Engagement Theory (Appleton et al., 2006)

Engagement Type	Survey Items
Affective	1, 2, 3, 4 (ENG)
Cognitive	6, 8 (CHL)
Behavioral	9, 10, 11 (USE)

Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)

The CHL subscale directly measures whether instruction is in the "flow channel" - neither too easy (boredom) nor too hard (anxiety).

IX. Validity Evidence

Content Validity

Items developed from:

- Literature review (student engagement, self-determination, stigma)
- Comprehensive case study analysis
- BASC-3 and Conners item design principles
- Person-first language guidelines

Face Validity

- Student-friendly language (Grade 3-4 reading level)
- Relevant to actual service experience
- Neutral, non-stigmatizing terminology

Construct Validity (Theoretical)

Subscales map to established constructs:

- Engagement (ENG) → Student Engagement Instrument
- Challenge (CHL) → Flow Theory
- Relationship (REL) → Therapeutic Alliance
- Voice (VOI) → Self-Determination Theory

X. Comparison: Stigmatizing vs. Destigmatized Language

Aspect	Stigmatizing (Avoid)	Destigmatized (Use)
Title	"Special Education Survey"	"My Learning Session Feedback"
Services	"Special help time"	"Learning session" / "Time with [Name]"
Need	"Getting extra help"	"The work I do"
Pull-out	"Leaving class for special help"	"Going to my session"
Benefit	"Makes school easier for me"	"Helps me do better in school"
Teacher	"My special ed teacher"	"My teacher" / "[Name]"
Identity	"Special needs student"	"Student"

XI. Quick Reference Card

VOICE Survey Scoring At-a-Glance

Reverse Items: 2, 5, 7, 22 → Score = 3 - Response

Subscales: ENG (1-4), CHL (5-8), USE (9-11), REL (12-15), VOI (16-18), EXP (19-22)

Interpretation: 0-25% Very Low → 26-50% Low → 51-75% Adequate → 76-100% High

Red Flag Items: 2, 5, 12, 18, 20, 22

Personalization: *Always use teacher's actual name when possible!*

XII. References

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