

## **EPISD Equity Assessment Survey Administration Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What demographic information is being collected by the EPISD Equity Assessment Student Survey?**

The student survey collects demographic information, including questions about identity, to help identify potential barriers to equity based on respondents' demographic characteristics. Elementary school students (4th and 5th graders) are shown questions about their race and ethnicity, language spoken at home, and military-connected status. Middle school and high school students (6th–12th grade) are shown these questions as well, in addition to questions about gender identity, sexual orientation, birth location, and legal guardian's birth location. All of these demographic questions are optional for respondents, meaning that they do not have to respond to any questions that they are not comfortable with or do not know the answers to.

Furthermore, we recognize that these are personal questions, which is why the survey is completely anonymous. There is no personally identifiable information collected through this survey. This allows students to provide information confidentially, ensuring their privacy, while helping us gather the necessary data to create a more inclusive, supportive environment for all students. Our goal is to use this information to better understand student experiences and to make sure appropriate resources and support systems are in place.

### **Why are you asking for information related to student gender identity and sexual orientation as a part of the demographic data requested?**

The student survey collects demographic information, including questions about gender identity and sexual orientation, to help us identify potential barriers to equity based on respondents' demographic characteristics. These demographic questions are a regular part of our equity assessment process and are designed to explore potential inequalities related to various social identities including, among others, gender identity and sexual orientation. EPISD does not independently collect this data, and therefore the only way for MAEC to assess the experiences of students from these identities is to ask the information directly of the student.

### **Why is it important to collect data on gender identity and sexual orientation in the survey?**

Understanding students' gender identity and sexual orientation helps identify any disparities in their experiences, support, or outcomes. Research has shown that students who identify as LGBTQIA+ are more likely to face bullying, discrimination, and mental health challenges, which can negatively impact their academic achievement and well-being. According to the 2019 GLSEN National School Climate Survey, 59.1% of LGBTQIA+ students reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 42.5% felt unsafe due to their gender expression. Collecting this data as a part of the EPISD Equity Assessment will allow the district to better understand any potential challenges and take

steps to address inequities, ensure that support systems are in place, and foster an inclusive, equitable learning environment for all students, regardless of their identity.

### **How are the exact questions pertaining to gender identity and sexual orientation worded?**

- Do you identify as transgender?
  - Responses: Yes/No/I prefer not to answer
- What is your gender identity?
  - Responses: Female/Male/Nonbinary/I prefer not to answer/I prefer to self-describe  
Please describe
- Do you identify as LGBTQIA+?
  - Responses: Yes/No/I prefer not to answer

### **Are there any other questions on the survey that pertain directly to gender identity and sexual orientation?**

No. Aside from the demographic questions, there are no other questions on the survey pertaining to these topics.

### **How does the survey define the term “transgender”?**

**Transgender** is an encompassing term of many gender identities of those who do not identify or exclusively identify with their sex assigned at birth. The term transgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life ([Trans Student Educational Resources, n.d.](#)).

### **How does the survey define the term “LGBTQIA+”?**

**LGBTQIA+** refers to a collection of identities and is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and aromantic. The plus (+) represents other identities not included in the acronym such as two-spirit, non-binary, and pansexual ([Trans Student Educational Resources, n.d.](#)).

### **Is every student asked these questions?**

Questions pertaining to gender identity and sexual orientation are only asked of older students (grades 6-12). All demographic questions are optional for students. Students can choose not to respond to these questions.

### **What is the purpose of asking middle and high school students about gender identity and sexual orientation, but not younger students?**

The survey is designed to be age-appropriate, and questions about gender identity and sexual orientation are included only for middle and high school students (grades 6-12). These questions are omitted for younger students to ensure the content is developmentally-appropriate for each age group.

**Does a student have to answer questions pertaining to sexual identity and sexual orientation?**

No. Students are free to skip these questions. Also, each question includes an option of “I prefer not to answer”.

**Does EPISD currently collect data about students’ gender identity and or sexual orientation?**

No. EPISD does not collect data on students’ gender identity or sexual orientation. The information gathered in the student survey is part of a specific equity assessment conducted by MAEC, which is designed to better understand students' experiences and identify potential barriers to equity. This data is collected anonymously and solely for the purpose of this assessment, with the goal of improving the learning environment for all students.

**Is the survey anonymous?**

Yes, the survey is anonymous. Personally identifiable information (including names of students or identification numbers) will NOT be collected. Participants will be asked to provide their school and demographic information only. MAEC takes great precautions to make sure any information shared with the district is reported in a way where it cannot be traced back to original respondents (i.e., data is not shared with EPISD until it is aggregated and anonymized, and the survey platform used ensures respondents' data cannot be traced back to them).

**How will the data be reported back to EPISD?**

The data collected through the student survey will be reported to EPISD in aggregate form. This means that individual responses will not be identifiable, and the information will be compiled into overall trends and patterns. MAEC will provide EPISD with a comprehensive report that highlights key findings from the survey, ensuring that student privacy is maintained throughout the process.

**Will the district have direct access to the raw data from this audit?**

No. EPISD will not have direct access to the raw data. MAEC will handle all data collected, ensuring that it is anonymized and aggregated before any findings are shared with the district. This approach is designed to protect the privacy of individual respondents while still allowing EPISD to benefit from the insights gained through the survey.

**What if I do not want my child to take the survey?**

All parents and guardians have the option to complete a student opt-out form if they do not wish for their students to take the survey. This form needs to be completed by Friday, October 25, 2024.

**What happens if a parent or student opts out of the survey?**

While the survey will be administered during school hours, participation in the survey is completely voluntary for students. Students and parents have the option to opt out of the survey if they do not wish to participate. There are no consequences for students or families who choose not to take part in the survey.

### **Does the EPISD curriculum teach about issues related to gender identity and/or sexual orientation?**

The EPISD curriculum does not explicitly teach about gender identity and/or sexual orientation. However, the district is fully committed to supporting the social-emotional well-being and academic success of all students, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. EPISD strives to create a safe, inclusive environment where all students feel supported and are given the opportunity to thrive.

### **Can parents and guardians see the questions before their child does the survey? How were the survey questions created?**

- We cannot share the questions before the survey is taken. Maintaining confidentiality around the questions allows students to approach the survey without preconceived ideas or external influences, leading to more reliable and valid results. [This document](#) provides a detailed rationale for why the full student survey is not available prior to administration.
- [This document](#) provides an overview of the survey and sample questions.
- The first draft of the questions were created by MAEC after the completion of an extensive review of EPISD policies and other documents. MAEC revised the surveys after receiving feedback gathered from the Equity Assessment Advisory Committee (EAAC) and the EPISD Department Strategic Planning Committee (DSP). EAAC membership is composed of students, staff, teachers, parents, alumni associations, military connections and community organizations. DSP membership is composed of district Chief Officers, departmental Executive Directors, and departmental Directors.

### **Why are some demographic questions (i.e. sexual orientation and gender identity) only included in the student survey and not the family survey?**

The goal of this assessment is to improve student outcomes and experiences by understanding the demographic makeup of our student body. Including questions on gender identity and sexual orientation is important, as national research shows that these groups often face inequities. We understand that these questions cover sensitive information. However, since EPISD does not currently collect this data, we lack the information needed to assess how demographic differences impact student experiences. Our external evaluators are collecting this data solely for the purpose of this assessment, ensuring that student identities remain protected and confidential. The district will not have access to this specific demographic data, which provides an extra layer of security for students and families to this sensitive data.

The purpose of gathering this data is to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all students. By collecting it, we can better identify and address any disparities related to students' identities, including gender identity and sexual orientation. Regarding the parent survey, it was designed with a different focus. While parents are key partners, the student equity assessment is primarily centered on student experiences. The parent survey focuses on gathering parents' perspectives on the district's environment and policies, which is why questions on parents' gender identity or sexual



orientation were not included, to respect participants' time and focus on the most relevant information.

For more information about the EPISD Equity Assessment, please visit the website at <https://www.episd.org/page/equity-assessment-action-plan>.